

Respecting Indigenous Voice and Learning from Each Other

My Story

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ROOTS

- Born in South Africa
- Nomad ancestors: India, Mauritius, England, South America
- So From Africa – BUT not African
- East Indian – BUT don't know India
- Have worked in Aboriginal Issues since 1987
- At times have joked that I am Indian gaining Status; at other times I am disenfranchised

INDIAN IN CANADA

So what does it mean to be Indian in Canada:

- For William Commanda, I was the political message: I was the real Indian, not he!
- This past Sunday, I learned who I am – I learned that William Commanda's great great grandson Noah Dewache had claimed me as **Black Indian** Grandmother at Algonquin College!

INDIAN

- Loaded term
- Especially so in the North American Context:
 - BIA – Bureau of Indians Affairs, US
 - Indian Act, Canada
- Globally
 - East Indians, West Indians, Indians of South America
- I have lived Canada since 1970 – and Canadian – BUT what does that mean?

COMPLEXITIES COMPOUND

- Notions of “Canada” are grounded in its colonial origins
- Multiple staged immigrations over the past five hundred years
- In the late 60s, Canada introduced its non-racist immigration policy
- Indians, visible like me, and African, were filtered in
- (NOTE Diversity: e.g. the difference between the Black diaspora versus the Black slaves of colonization histories)

CHALLENGES OF TERMINOLOGY

- Arrived in Canada in **1970**
- From an insulated “Indian” zone within a racist regime of **apartheid** – “separate development” euphemism
- Arrived in time for **political unrest in Canada** – FLQ, bloodshed, civil unrest, army tanks
- Contributed to implementation of federal policies of **Bilingualism and Multiculturalism**

VISIBILITIES

- Newer immigrants were invariably visible in the dominant face of White Canada
- The term Visible Minorities took root
- Indigenous Peoples, whose had been programed to “disappear” were the “invisible nations” by now
- The 1969 White Paper drew them to the fore
- BUT they got lumped in with the Vis Mins

FIRST PEOPLES

- By and large they resented this
- It was bad enough to have to contend with the colonizer oppressors, and the new European immigrant settlers
- Now they were being categorized with Canada's newest occupiers of their ancestral lands
- STILL creates some challenges for me

COMMONALITIES

- Many forgot that we had all come from similar experiences of colonization, expropriation, oppression, racism – in India, Africa, America – and also Australia and New New Zealand
- In North America, some forgot how Indigenous women inspired the suffragettes; and how Indigenous and Black fought together and learned from civil rights movements from the 20s

WILLIAM COMMANDA

- BUT William Commanda, activist with the **North American Indigenous Nations Government** since 1940s, did not
- He was well acquainted with **Mahatma Gandhi's** strategies
- He did pipe ceremony for **Martin Luther King**
- He admired **Nelson Mandela** for walking out of 27 years of imprisonment with forgiveness
- William Commanda realized we had to all see our connectednes, including with our “white” siblings
- Comment on Henry David **Thoreau – whose philosophy influenced many – learned from his Penobscot guide**

MY RESUME

- Arrived in 1970
- **Beaded necklace** from Marsha Forest, Six Nations Reserve – Indigenous Welcome
- Studied English, Canadian, American and African **Literature**
- Ended up working in the **criminal justice system**
- Inherited a **multi racial family**, re-ordering SA

SERVICE TO CANADA

- Supporting and **transforming the racial** dimension at family, community and national levels (including with the Wolf Project)
- Parole officer – **protecting the public:**
 - Negotiating public security
 - Advancing rehabilitation
- Public Servant – Immigrant serving new homeland
- Senior management training in federal government

1981 – PRAIRIES

- **Pivotal Question** – Keith Wright from CSC
How do you feel about Native Peoples
- Correct response: given my history, no racism
- 1987 assigned to work in Aboriginal Corrections
- Realized I had not given **The right answer**
- First Peoples are in a league of their own – that's now my cause: **earthworm work**: learning, understanding and transmitting to cleanse, heal historical wrongs

ABORIGINAL INJUSTICE

- Researched **Justice Inquiries** in all provinces and territories – **overt and systemic racism**
- **Donald Marshall Junior Inquiry**
- **Manitoba Justice Inquiry** – Helen Betty Osborne – Justice Murray Sinclair
- **OKA Crisis**
- **Women in Federal Prison**

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP



ABORIGINAL JUSTICE WORK – 90s

- Aboriginal Corrections
- Federally Sentenced Women
- Aboriginal Policing
 - Urban Aboriginal Policing
 - First Nations Policing Policy
- Aboriginal Justice
 - Aboriginal Justice Learning Network

HOPE DASHED

- Promising national restorative work compromised by government policies and practice, amongst other things
- 2015- 20 – Dismal Assessment of Correctional Investigator regarding Indigenous Peoples in the criminal justice system
- Genocidal propensity
- Broken promises

WILLIAM COMMANDA

- Met **William Commanda** in the context of my Aboriginal Justice work in 1997
- **Began to understand the scope of his work**
- **Took early retirement** to support his Circle of All Nations work in 2002
- **Sacrifice** : career, income, family, time
- Published **Learning From a Kindergarten Dropout in 2005** – all key Indigenous topics of the day are already registered there

KEY HISTORICAL MOMENTS

- Historical moments: Tessautot – 1603/1613
- 1760; Pontiac: 1763 Royal Proclamation; 1794
- Philomen Wright: 1800/1802
- Tecumseh: War of 1812
- Pakinawatik: 1851 – 1853 – River Desert
- Dominion of Canada: 1867
- 1945 – North American Indian Nations Government
- 1968 Welcomed PM Trudeau; 1969 White Paper; Wounded Knee: 1972

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

- Great great grandfather **Pakinawatik** asserted rights to Algonquin Territory in the Ottawa River Watershed, over the course of three canoe trips to Upper Canada, accompanied by Bishop Gigués
- Algonquins decimated by war, disease and centuries of oppression but **knowledge of territory and rights unfaded**
- But had to compromise with securing of three land bases reserved at River Desert/Kitigan Zibi, Golden Lake and Temiscaming as sanctuary
- **Algonquins acknowledged on both sides of the Ottawa River**

WILLIAM COMMANDA - 1967

- **Conscious N. American project** – launched international peace gathering in Eganville
- 1968 – Meeting with new PM Pierre Trudeau
- **Conscious political project:**
- **“I welcome you to my territory and my country”**
- **1969 Gathering of 1500 Indigenous**
- Challenged premises of White Paper

SPIRIT OF THE SHARING WAMPUM



WILLIAM COMMANDA

University of Ottawa Linkages

- Kindergarten Dropout to Dr. Commanda
- Justice Award – Aboriginal Legal Studies
- Launch of Aboriginal Program at his lodge
- Dr. William Commanda Scholarship for Medical Students
- Supported first Organizing for Justice event
- William Commanda Hall/Pavillion created by former Governor General Michaëlle Jean

WILLIAM COMMANDA- 1997

- Sacred Wampum Belt Heritage
- Language
- Sustainable Relations
- Gatherings
- Environmental Stewardship
- Racial Harmony and Peace building
- Social Justice
- Influence government policy; awaken Algonquin presence in the National Capital Region
- ASINABKA Indigenous Healing and Peace Building Center at Sacred Chaudiere Falls

SHARING WAMPUM BELT

- Indigenous in the centre, welcoming and sharing
- Circle of All Nations – global eco community linked by his work and values
- Global citizenship grounded in his Indigenous ideology
- 14 year round the clock apprenticeship
- NOW: Researching what I learned from him, to concretize his honorary doctorate degrees
- Leave an academic record of a most brilliant man

LESSONS

- Understand the history
- Understand the urgency
- See links between the global and local
- Understand **Ginawaydaganuc**: relatedness
- Respect and responsibility: **MOTHER EARTH**
- Good enough for two: **PEACE**
- Encore Vivant!
- CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS, CULTURE OF PEACE
- **PATH TO SELF RESPECT** in a floundering Canada

RESEARCH: Tangible and intangible

- The overall **discourse and semantics of Indigenous Peoples** does not easily translate into the understandings of western academic researchers
- As a consequence ideas are often underestimated and considered simplistic
- Better understanding of the semantics can contribute to deeper appreciation of the **complex knowledge base**

I examine whether and how

- A better understanding of his Indigenous approach to knowledge generation can lead to some level of
 - Formal integration in western academic disciplines; and
 - **Co-creation of new knowledge** critical for these times of massive climate change, environmental and human crises

An integrated approach

- While William Commananda's thinking is grounded in a deeply Indigenous idiom, he was expansive in his animation of the fundamental principles of biodiversity in his creation of the *Circle of All Nations*
- As such, it is more than about the expression of the Indigenous; it is also about its influence on the collective.

Can his approach be integrated?

- I believe this aspiration must be theorized within an integrated framework that draws out critical elements which
 - Permit scrutiny that is **theoretically grounded and viable in the western academy**, and
 - Permit scrutiny that is **empirically grounded and respects Indigenous parameters**

A Proposed Methodology

- My overall framework is *Post Structural*, questioning and deconstructing foundational structures, and exploring the plurality of meaning
- The principal lens is *Foucauldian Discourse Analysis* and its examination of knowledge, *power*, truth and truth effects
- My hypothesis is that forms of discourse can be created and made relevant beyond those determined by power and knowledge embedded in institutional structures of position, authority, hierarchy, and capital

The Focus is both Abstract and Action Oriented

- **Abstract** i.e. it is theoretical and conceptual, dissociated from any specific entity, the specific entity having to be abstracted from concrete existence;
- **Action oriented** , regarding the continued relevance, animation and emergence of the *discourse*
- I suggest **multiple logics of inquiry** can facilitate this analysis

A Conceptual Tool

- Over the past fifteen years, William Commanada's *Circle of All Nations* work has been developed within the **conceptual framework** of a Medicine Wheel
- I position the four *Logics of Inquiry* this framework to illustrate my theoretical approach

Logics of Inquiry

- **Performance Mapping**: to explore the ideological framework and *Anicinabe* underpinnings of his thoughts/ideas;
- **Historical/Dialectical**: to ground his story, including its inseparability from contemporary history
- **Phenomenological**: to substantiate an interpretative approach to analysis
- **Cybercartographical**: to examine multi-dimensional reporting and emergent elements

An Iteration of the Commanda Discourse

**A CIRCLE of ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE of PEACE**
FOUNDED BY
WILLIAM COMMANDA
a global eco community
united by values of

- RESPECT
- RESPONSIBILITY
- FORGIVENESS
- COMPASSION

Focussed on advancing

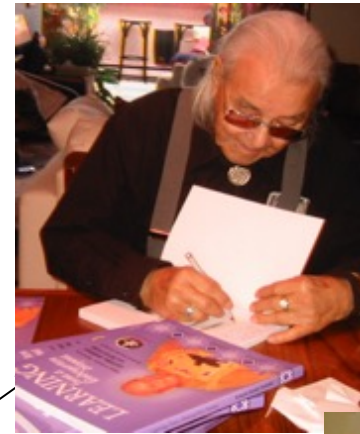
- INDIGENOUS WISDOM
- RESPECT for MOTHER EARTH
- RACIAL HARMONY
- SOCIAL JUSTICE

Recipient of TS BALEP
CORONA BOREALIS

**ASINABKA
SACRED CHAUDIERE
SITE**

- Indigenous Centre
- Peace Building
- Eco City Park
- Historic Park

Reconciliation



CANOE
Spirit of MANTOU
Where was Manitou before
he created the Earth?
'In his Canoe, which was
floating in the skies'
The Indigenous Canoe
- the penitentiary symbol
Wonder of Canada

- Integrating the physical & metaphysical
- Integrating Spirit, Art, Craft & Invention with the practical & sustainable

The Metaphor for Navigating the Journey of one's Life

HISTORY - ANCIENT HISTORY

well beyond 4000 years

- BILLIONS of YEARS AGO, the BEST ANCIENT ROCKS EMERGED HERE
- + 5000 YEARS AGO → MEETING PLACE of INDIGENOUS PEOPLES of N.A.
- 400 years AGO, WILLIAM'S ANCESTORS PRAYED HERE AS CHAMPLAIN WATCHED
- IN the 1500s, there were PLUS 100,000,000 peoples in Amer.
- DECIMATED BY ORIGINAL GERM WARFARE + near GENOCIDE
- IN the 1800's the LAND TRANSFORMATION BEGAN →
- FUR TRADE • LOGGING • DAMS
- HYDRO • NUCLEAR ENERGY
- ie. RESOURCES of WILLIAM'S ANCESTORS GAVE BIRTH to CANADA

PARKS & the BOREAL FOREST

- 70% of NATIONAL PARKS WERE CREATED AT THE INSISTENCE OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES
- THE BOREAL RENDEZVOUS IS EMBEDDED IN THE PRAYERS OF OUR ELDER

WE ARE LIVING IN TIMES of PROPHECY

ONLY AFTER THEN IS NOW

- THE LAST TREE IS CUT LOGGING IN DECLINE
- RIVER IS POISONED OTEWA RIVER PARK
- LAST FISH CAUGHT ANKENTEEL ENDAWE
- THEN YOU WILL KNOW AND
- MONEY CAN'T BEHOLD GLOBAL CRISIS

William Commanda is THE TIDELESS LOVE OF THE EARTH AND THE BLOOD OF THE EARTH

**WATER FALLS
of the
SPIRIT OF WATER**

- ONE OF THE FOUR SACRED ELEMENTS
- CONTAMINATED, POLLUTED + DEPLETED EVERYWHERE

WILLIAM COMMANDA SAYS

we believe Mother Earth is a living creature. She has body & spirit + veins. The rivers are her veins. If they are blocked everywhere, cancers, poisons build up, eventually they kill. Dams, motor vehicles, foreign animals, fertilizers, pesticides, grey sewage are attacks on the life blood of Mother Earth. She has to fight back. AS NATURE'S LAW

**SPIRIT of the NORTH
WISDOM OF THE OLDER SIB**

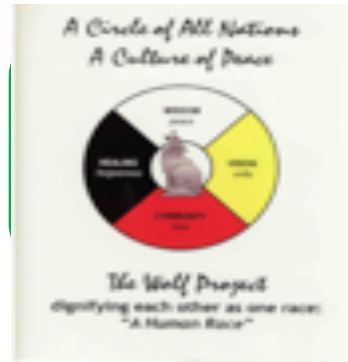
Recipient of TS BALEP
CORONA BOREALIS

**FROM the HEART of POLAR BEAR
A MESSAGE**

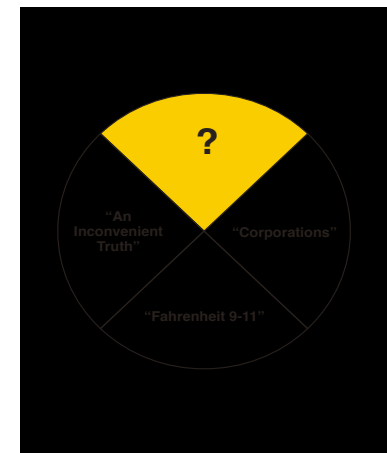
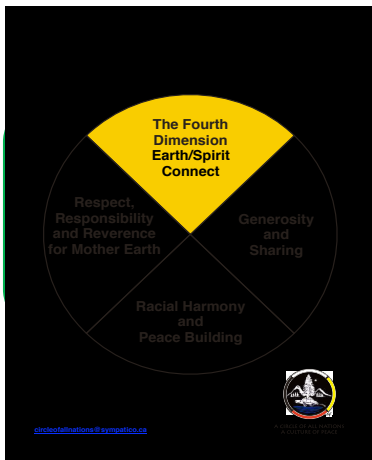
**TROPHY they
THINK they CREATED!**

SAVING SHOES

- IN THE OLD DAYS WILLIAM WALKED 50 MILES A DAY ON HIS SHOES. AND ALL THE COMMANDA WERE HEARTY + FIT



Overt and Systemic Racism



- Can an analysis of the work as proposed contribute to a deeper understanding of the discourse William Commanada created and the critical role others play in the germination and manifestation of his projects?
- Can this generate respect for the **Indigenous knowledge generation process** and recognition of its place for **bridging and co-creating** in a world that is both increasingly interconnected and disconnected?

Can a better understanding of William
Commanda's unique bridge-building discourse
within the academy contribute to

Greater integration of approaches to environment
and relationship in a world quite literally "on fire"?

CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS



INDIGENOUS GOES GLOBAL

Hope for the Living – and Children



*A Circle of All Nations
A Culture of Peace*



**A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS
A CULTURE OF PEACE**