

“Beyond Sustainability: Imagining an Ecological Future”

November 30, 2020

Common CAHSS Conference 2020¹

Sources and Acknowledgments

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Introductory Notes: This talk, [available on YouTube](#), was the opening plenary session (offered via Microsoft Teams Live) for the [Common CAHSS](#) 2020 Conference at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. My colleague Professor Ryan Martin shared the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay [Land Acknowledgment](#) at the opening of the session, and my colleague Professor Alison Staudinger skillfully guided me through the questions at the end. In the conclusion of the talk, I quote a sentence from Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “All flourishing is mutual.” This phrase appears five times in the book (on pages 15, 20, 21, 166, and 382), and Kimmerer presents it as one of the “teachings of plants” mentioned in the subtitle. Given the degree to which this talk was inspired and informed by writings and teachings of First Nations people, which have been offered freely to all people, including settler colonists, I’d like to encourage anyone who watches the talk to consider how the United States and Canada could move toward reciprocity and justice for First Nations people today--as an essential aspect of moving beyond sustainability.

Sources and Further Reading:

Abram, David. [Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology](#). Vintage, 2010.

[Basic Call to Consciousness](#). Edited by Akwesasne Notes. Book Publishing Company, 1978.²

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² This volume includes “A Basic Call to Consciousness: The Hau De No Sau Nee Address to the Western World,” which was written primarily by John Mohawk (Sotsisowah), a historian, writer, and activist of the Seneca Nation, and was presented in Geneva, Switzerland in 1977, as part of the International

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- Jamail, Dahr. [*The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Disruption*](#). The New Press, 2019.
- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. [*Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*](#). Milkweed Editions, 2013 & 2020.
- . [“Corn Tastes Better on the Honor System.”](#) *Emergence Magazine*. Nov. 2018.
- . [“The Intelligence of Plants.”](#) *On Being with Krista Tippett*. February 25, 2016.
- . [“Reclaiming the Honorable Harvest.”](#) TEDxSitka, Aug 18, 2012.
- . [“Skywoman Falling.”](#) *Emergence Magazine*. 2020.
- . [“Speaking of Nature: Finding Language that Affirms our Kinship with the Natural World.”](#) *Orion Magazine*. March/April 2017.
- Kolbert, Elizabeth. [*The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*](#). Picador, 2014.
- Krznaric, Roman. [*The Good Ancestor: A Radical Prescription for Long-Term Thinking*](#). Penguin, 2020.³

Non-Governmental Organization Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in the Americas.

³ This is an accessible book that will likely make an impact on public discourse. The [“Tug of War for Time”](#) graphic provides an overview of the main points. Krznaric in no way originated the concept of being a good ancestor, and he doesn’t claim to. He states: “I am deeply indebted to the indigenous peoples in the US, who had an image of seven generations being the appropriate time to think about the future” (78); moreover, he quotes Onondaga leader Oren Lyons (p. 76). Unfortunately, on page 77, Krznaric falls

- Leopold, Aldo. [*A Sand County Almanac & Other Writings on Conservation and Ecology*](#). Library of America, 2013.
- [*Living Planet Report 2020*](#). World Wide Fund For Nature. 2020.
- Lyons, Oren. "[Looking Toward the Seventh Generation](#)." American Indian Studies Program, University of Arizona. Tucson, Arizona. April 17, 2008. Presentation.
- Macy, Joanna, and Molly Brown. [*Coming Back to Life: An Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects*](#). New Society Publishers, 2014.
- Murphy-Shigematsu, Stephen. [*From Mindfulness to Heartfulness: Transforming Self and Society with Compassion*](#). Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018.
- Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. [*Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*](#). Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010.
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- "[Statement of Commitment to Ecocentrism](#)." *Ecological Citizen*.
- "[Sustainable Development Goals](#)." United Nations.
- "[Tales of Sweetgrass & Trees: Robin Wall Kimmerer & Richard Powers with Terry Tempest Williams](#)." Panel Discussion. Harvard University. March 26, 2019.
- Voelker, David J. "[Statement of Commitment to Ecocentrism](#)." Blog post. April 28, 2020.
- Wallace-Wells, David. [*The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*](#). Tim Duggan Books, 2019.
- Weller, Francis. [*The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*](#). North Atlantic Books, 2015.

prey to a phony work of scholarship, posted on the internet by a group purporting to be scholarly, that suggests that the association of the Seventh Generation principle with the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) is a myth. I have chosen not to link to this blog post to avoid promoting misinformation, but suffice it to say that the post's author attempts to use an anecdote to deny the deep roots of Seventh Generation thinking in Haudenosaunee culture, while also noting that he doesn't have access to his library to provide any actual evidence, beyond a misrepresentation of a written version of the Great Law of Peace as constituting a faithful representation of Haudenosaunee thought. *Basic Call to Consciousness*, in a section written in 1977 by John Mohawk, clearly states: "Our culture is based on a principle that directs us to constantly think about the welfare of seven generations in the future" (93).

White, Lynn, Jr. "[The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis](#)." *Science*. Vol. 155, Issue 3767 (10 Mar 1967): 1203-1207.

Acknowledgments:

It may be unusual to offer lengthy acknowledgments for a 30-minute talk, but it feels important to me to do so, given that I am attempting to speak not only as a scholar (who must cite sources) but also a whole person.

I am grateful to [CAHSS](#) Associate Dean Ryan Martin for his work in developing the [Common CAHSS conference](#), of which this is the second iteration, and for the tremendous work that he put into co-chairing the event with me. Likewise, I thank CAHSS Dean Chuck Rybak for his support of this event; Dean Assistant Amanda Wildenberg for providing excellent behind the scenes support--literally so, when she ran Teams Lives events; and the [Common CAHSS planning committee](#). I would also like to thank my colleagues Alison Staudinger, Elizabeth Wheat, and Chris Williams for the wonderful and thought-provoking presentations that they gave during the Fall 2020 semester, leading up to the 11/30 to 12/4 conference:

- "[Making Good Choices: Thinking about Ethics Beyond Sustainability](#)," Dr. Alison Staudinger, 9/24/20
- "[The Civil Rights Movement meets the Environmental Movement: How We Can Advocate for Environmental Justice](#)," Dr. Elizabeth Wheat, 10/22/20
- "[The Land was Never Some of Ours': Sustainability and Ecopoetic Perspectives on the Future](#)," Dr. Chris Williams, 11/18/20

I am grateful for teachings that I have received from a number of First Nations elders over the years, including: Rosemary Christensen (Mole Lake Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa), Napos (David Turney, Menominee Nation), Carol Cornelius (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican), the late Dorothy Davids (Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican), Loretta Metoxen (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin), David Courchene, Jr. (Sagkeeng Ojibwe First Nation, Manitoba, Canada), and Joe Rose, Sr. (Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa). Their teachings and perspectives have shaped and informed my views in many ways, though I do not claim that these elders would endorse my positions.

I have benefited tremendously from a number of wonderful teachers. Going back to my undergraduate and graduate school mentors, I'd like to name Marsha Dutton, Philip Barlow, George M. Curtis, III, and the late Frank Luttmer (along with many other excellent faculty at

Hanover College from 1992 to 1996) and my doctoral adviser Donald Mathews (along with many other excellent faculty members at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from 1996 to 2003). These teachers modeled for me passionate and honest inquiry as well as authenticity—among other virtues.

I am grateful to all of the participants in communities that have helped open my mind and heart, including: the entire Village Fire community (and its founder Liz Rog, elders Deanna Pumpkin and Laurence Cole, and Gretchen Sleicher, who guided me through my first experience with the [Work that Reconnects](#) spiral); the participants in the 2017 and 2018 grief retreats at Holy Wisdom Monastery with Francis and Judith Weller, organized by Mary Friedel-Hunt; the editorial team for [Deep Times: A Journal of the Work that Reconnects](#), facilitated by Molly Brown; Kathleen Rude and all of the participants in her September 2019 Active Hope Workshop with the Council of All Beings; the Lake Superior Traditional Ways Gathering community; the facilitators and participants in the 2019 Teach for Life NVC Educators Institute 2019; the facilitators and participants in the June 2013 Land Ethic Leaders program at the Aldo Leopold Foundation, including my friends Kelli Covey and Christopher Martin; the participants in the 2017 UWGB Dialogue Fellows program; the participants in the 2017 UWGB Contemplative Pedagogy Cohort; the participants in my Lifelong Learning Institute classes on Aldo Leopold and Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*; friends Heidi, Adrian, Emily, and Mary for our 2019 dialogue group, among other gifts; and the First Nations Fusion group at UWGB, which I was so fortunate to work with for many years. I'd especially like to thank my colleagues in First Nations Studies, Lisa Poupart, Forrest Brooks, and J P Leary, who have been trusted advisors and friends for many years, as I worked (and continue to work) on integrating First Nations into my courses.

Many other wonderful colleagues and friends at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay have helped sustain me for seventeen and a half years here. Conversations with colleagues in the UW System, including Sam Cocks, Greta Gaard, and Peter Olson, also shaped my views. How could I begin to thank the many hundreds of students over the years whom I have had the honor of learning with? This semester, I am particularly grateful to Mari Mitchell, who is serving as the peer mentor in our first-year seminar on the climate crisis.

Although I cannot say "finally," as the acknowledgments above barely scratch the surface of my many debts to people, places, plant and animal beings, and experiences, in closing (and with sincere apologies for all of the beings who remain unnamed here) I would like to thank *all* of my family, including my parents Joyce and Bob, my wife Nicole, and my son James, all of whom help me be who I am in so many ways; my grandfather Oscar C. Voelker, who during his

life worked as a soil and water conservation officer, was a founding member of his county's parks department, and who helped instill in me a spirit of conservation and restoration by enlisting me as a boy to plant hundreds of trees; and my perpetual friends, Tammy, Sue, Alison, Brian, Chip, and John.