

## **University of Southern Mississippi – A Tribal Moral Community**

### **PART 5**

In this series, we will review the peculiar behavior of faculty at USM -- peculiar because their behavior is inconsistent with their extensive education and training. We shall show how science-trained colleagues totally ignored their long years of education and research in favor of irrational behavior. (See, Parts 1-3 for background information in this series.)

A framework to understand our colleagues' irrational behavior is "Tribal Morality" which was recently discussed in several widely published articles. For readers' convenience, we'll apply "Tribal Morality" from the perspective contained in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* report entitled, "De-Tribalizing Academe" by Peter Wood.

"De-Tribalizing" faculty behavior continues with Gordon C. Cannon. His behavior, like others in this series, is selected because he was subject to sworn depositions or, like "Skip" Hughes, insisted on recording conversations. In other words, we report evidence based on their words.

#### **Part 5: Gordon C. Cannon, Ombudsman, University of Southern Mississippi**

President Martha Saunders assigned Ombudsman Gordon C. Cannon with recommending whether to terminate Professor DePree's tenure and employment at USM. At his deposition on April 16, 2010 Cannon was asked:

**Well, did you confirm any of the assertions that he [DePree] made, the substantive aspects of his claims that you received?**

**Cannon: His claims of what?**

**Well, for example, if he's dealing with plagiarism as one of the issues, did you seek to determine the basis for his claim and whether it was –**

**Cannon: That was outside the scope of my investigation. I was investigating a series of complaints against him [DePree].**

**If other faculty members were making allegations based on this claim [about plagiarism], do you think you should have considered the underlying basis for it?**

**Cannon: That was sort of beyond my power or duties. So I did not, no.**

Alvin Williams, then-Interim Dean, was interviewed by Cannon during his "investigation" of Professor DePree. Williams, whose letter [of accusations against

DePree] was prominently represented by President Saunders and Ombudsman Cannon as significant to them, made demonstrably false statements about the evidence DePree put forward to USM administrators and the AACSB about USM administrator and faculty plagiarism. [See, [University and AACSB Diversity: Interim Dean Alvin Williams and President Martha Saunders Exercise Power to Punish Legitimate Speech.](#)] Cannon had significant and sufficient independent evidence to observe that Interim Dean Alvin Williams made false claims to punish Professor DePree for offering evidence of administrator and faculty plagiarism.

Cannon's purpose was, as he testified, to verify the allegations were made, not that the allegations were supported with any evidence much less sufficient evidence to support the allegations. Dr. Cannon didn't care whether there was any "substantiation". The allegations, and confirmation that the allegations were made, were enough for him.

(You may email the editor at [marcdepree@gmail.com](mailto:marcdepree@gmail.com) for a copy of Dr. Cannon's deposition.)

What would Gordon C. Cannon, PhD, have done if he were applying the principles of science, *i.e.*, a careful description and consideration of facts and evidence to the accusations against Professor DePree? At a minimum he would have professed and demonstrated through behavior an unequivocal concern for the truth of others' and his representations. So, why didn't he?

### **A Community of Tribal Morality**

Let's assume that Gordon C. Cannon understands that the principles of science, evidence, and reason advance knowledge in areas of his discipline and outside his discipline of Chemistry. It follows that there may be another process underway that helps us understand his irrational behavior. (This analysis also assumes he is not suffering from a mental disorder.)

#### Consider Gordon C. Cannon's behavior from the perspective of Tribal Morality.

Professor Marc DePree, DBA, had collected independent evidence of corruption by USM administrators and some USM faculty, including independent evidence of plagiarism. The response from President Saunders was not to investigate the independent evidence of corruption by USM administrators and USM faculty, but was to assign Gordon C. Cannon, Ombudsman, to investigate Professor DePree. (We'll "de-tribalize" President Saunders later in this series.) With the choice of applying scientific principles or the principle of inviolable sacredness of USM, Cannon chose to apply the principle that USM is inviolably sacred and beyond question or investigation. USM, The Dome, President Saunders—especially through her expensive public relations campaign of aligning herself *as* the University of Southern Mississippi—"...had been raised to the status of inviolably sacred [symbols]" "[T]here was no room among the devotees, [like Gordon C. Cannon],

to give thoughtful, rational consideration to..." the evidence available to him in support of DePree's allegations of corruption. And, since Cannon was devoted to the inviolable sacredness of USM, Cannon could and did completely ignore any evidence showing the accusations of corruption against USM administrators were true and completely ignored any evidence that accusations against DePree were false.

"When the sacred kicks in, [Gordon C. Cannon's] rational capacity gets detoured: '[He] use[s] [his] reasoning not to find the truth but to find ways to defend what [he] hold[s] as sacred.'"

The result? An irrational Gordon C. Cannon, Ph.D.