

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

### **PART 6**

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 7: 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:

**Now, you say: Dr. DePree provided me with the transcript of a recent Federal Court proceeding? [The sworn testimony in the transcript included several faculty who contradicted DePree's accusers.]**

**Cannon: Uh-huh (affirmative).**

**Question: Did you read that court proceeding?**

**Cannon: Parts of it. It was rather lengthy.**

**Question: What in the Federal Court proceeding did you review?**

**Cannon: Probably the first three pages and the last three pages.**

**Question: Do you believe you gave it proper consideration in your report?**

**Cannon: Yes.**

**Question: What was the basis for that decision not to completely review the document?**

**Cannon: Relevance, you know, if I thought that there was anything –**

**Question: How would you know if it was relevant or not if you didn't read it all?  
(University attorney interrupted because he knew his client was in trouble. Cannon's behavior was irresponsible and the performance of his duties as ombudsman was incompetent.)**

**Cannon said he “probably” read “the first three pages and the last three pages” of extensive sworn testimony. The truth is he “probably” didn’t read the sworn testimony at all. If he didn’t go any farther than the first three pages and last three pages, he didn’t see any testimony. Had he performed his duties as the trained scientist that he was supposed to be, he would have studied the evidence and facts and acted to confirm them. He would have learned, for example, that DePree’s accusers either recanted the statements or contradicted the statements they had made in letters that President Saunders was relying on to punish DePree’s speech.**

**When your job is on the line because administrators or faculty don’t like your speech, is this the due process you can expect? To quote Ombudsman Cannon, “probably.”**

**Is Ombudsman Cannon abandoning reason and evidence he applies as a chemist and taking up tribal morality as a member of the USM administration?**

**(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. He would have studied the sworn depositions of all DePree’s accusers. 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. Why he acted and drew conclusions on the basis of ignorance as preferable to knowledge when his decisions can end the career of a colleague. A career was not important enough to apply his science training, would a life on the line make a difference? If a life were at stake, would he have been as willing to act on ignorance? How about a train full of jews headed for a crematorium? Would that have**

made a difference to Cannon? We don't know how far he'd go with being comfortable acting on ignorance.

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. The response from President Saunders was not to investigate the independent evidence of corruption by USM administrators and some 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. This occurs with every type of organization, including clubs, universities, and political parties like the Nazis. History is replete with participants like Cannon.

USM, The Dome, President Saunders—especially through her expensive and extensive 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.