

## Sacred Indian view of life may save planet, academics say

By Dana Flavelle  
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They couldn't be more unlike. Pam Colorado, small and dark, is a North American Indian who grew up in the wilderness learning the ancient ways of her people at her grandfather's side.

David Peat, tall and pale, is an Englishman from Liverpool who spent his early childhood cultivating a passion for modern science.

But years later, as accomplished academics in very different fields, Colorado and Peat have found a bond in their mutual search for new ways to heal our troubled planet.

War, environmental disasters and the high cost of technologically based health care are a few of the problems that must be addressed in radically new ways, and quickly, they say.

"In my opinion, the problems facing the Earth are critical," says Colorado, who is now a professor of social work and native studies at the University of Calgary.

"Conventional science has

missed something," says Peat, a physicist, author and consultant based in Ottawa. "It has given us an incredibly detailed map of the world, which is very useful. But it has had a lot of unpleasant side effects . . . deterioration of the ozone layer, global warming and things like that."

To share their views, the pair were in Toronto to address a group of 30 other interested academics, environmentalists and futurists at a conference sponsored by the Institute for Cultural Affairs.

Providing forums for leading edge thinkers such as Colorado and Peat is one of the functions of the independent, non-profit institute.

The cause of many of the world's problems is modern scientific thought, with its overly simplistic, mechanistic view of nature, Peat believes. Every time we try to fix one problem, we seem to create another.

Colorado thinks the solution may lie in the past, in what she calls "indigenous science."

Put simply, indigenous science refers to the native people's view

that everything in the world is sacred and interconnected and, in many ways, beyond our control.

It's a concept that, coincidentally, is in vogue among leading-edge Western scientists such as Peat, who have come to some of the same conclusions through the chaos theory of physics.

"It's that sense that we're all part of a great web of life in which everything plays a role and has to be respected," Peat says.

Take the problem of acid rain, for example. The conventional approach is to pass laws limiting emissions from coal-fired hydroelectric plants. The indigenous approach might be to re-examine the lifestyle that creates the high demand for those plants in the first place.

"By looking at the world differently, you begin to change your values. You may become less concerned with the whole notion of progress," Peat says.

He and Colorado are also trying to spread their ideas through the World Wide Indigenous Sci-

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Modern science is overly simplistic, say David Peat and Pam Colorado.

## Native science looks at root of problem

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ence Network, a group Colorado founded two years ago in Alberta. Intended to bridge the gap between modern Western and ancient native thinking, the network counts about 60 academics, business people and anyone else interested in healing the planet among its members.

Its lines of communication now reach as far as California, Mexico City, Hawaii, New Zealand, Nigeria, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines. By starting this dialogue between native and non-native people, Colorado hopes to create profound social and personal change around the world.

The notion that there might be an indigenous science with something positive to contribute to society came to her slowly and painfully.

For many years, while struggling up the academic ladder toward her PhD in social sciences, she worked hard at hiding the fact, even from herself, that she is Indian.

"As a native person, I was raised with the same myths and stereotypes you were: that we were stupid, primitive types and all we did was follow the animals around. I watched the Lone Ranger and Tonto and all that stuff growing up, so that was my idea of what being Indian meant."

Suddenly, in the late '70s, on the verge of finishing her thesis, she hit a roadblock. She couldn't write the required outline for the last four chapters.

It took a year and half of agonizing over blank pages before she realized what was holding her

back: A sacred native belief that you can never presume the outcome of any endeavor.

It's like the Dene hunter who, faced with an empty larder, puts on his parka, packs up his gun and says: "I'm going for a walk." He would never say, "I'm going hunting."

"I realized then that we don't just have different cultures, we native people have a science of our own, a way of coming to knowledge of our own . . . We go for a walk. We come prepared, we keep ourselves open . . . but it's not up to us to decide what the conclusion will be.

"In a Western social scientific way I was being told to outline where you're going and how you're going to get there. It was exactly the opposite."

That revelation marked the beginning for Colorado of a long journey back to embrace her native origins as an Oneida Indian and member of the Six Nations.

It has sometimes been painful. Watching the army and Quebec police battle it out with Mohawk Warriors over disputed Indian land in Oka this summer both saddened and terrified her.

Over the next few years, the indigenous science network is planning to stage three major events aimed at boosting public awareness of some of the problems the world is facing.

There will be a walk along an Inca trail, a trek across North America from Canada into Siberia and a voyage around the Pacific in ocean-going canoes, in each case following the routes taken by indigenous peoples centuries earlier.