

What Nature Will We Nurture?

(Written & Performed for the Canal Park Restoration Celebration 2005)

As we restore this triangle back to the beauty of nature
A presumed place of peace and growth
As we turn this cement to soil
What nature will we nurture?
What will we care to cultivate?
What spirit and responsibility do we inherit? Inhabit?
And what insight will we gather with this new budding growth?
A park Canoe place
These waters that still run below, that fed and led the ways for the First Peoples to travel
The Lenape, Algonquin-speaking First Nations
The Werpoes villages close by this very sight we celebrate
Can you hear the voices of young Native children playing just down the way?
Giggles tickling their tongues in joyful emanations
Now listen closer
Can you hear the screams of bloody murder as nursing babies were ripped from
their mothers' breasts, sliced to pieces and thrown into the waters and fires?
Simultaneous massacres in Pavonia
And directly across from here by the East River at the Rechtank village
An onslaught of slaughters Kieft's Wars A marathon of bloodbaths
Colonial soldiers torturing, castrating and stuffing men's genitals in their mouths
Cutting off their heads, as director Kieft's mother-in-law
Kicked the heads around as soccer balls for some sort of sordid sport
Their armies murdering Native men, women, children
Butchering whole villages, as the First Nations' numbers were rapidly ravaged

From 1643 to 1664 the Dutch obliterated nearly all of the local Indigenous nations
The only survivors remaining as refugees amongst nearby nations
No direct lines of culture or blood exist from then to now, except within these adopted
nations

What flows in the springs that run below this landfill on which we stand?
Blood of Indigenous babies with gaping wounds yet untended
Without even a bare minimal remedial balm of accountability and apology

With our restoration celebration, what spirits and understanding will we summon to restore us

To make us whole, make these grounds holy again?

As we claim to reclaim this soil, this earth, this displaced dirt

Can we come clean?

And face the filthy failings?

Transcend the atrocities of the histories and holocausts on these shores?

As we pause in this place of apparent peace and beauty

Can we sense the spirits unsettled, crying out for parity and recompense?

Do we dare to open our inner ear to hear the voices of Indigenous Peoples

Here amongst us and throughout this planet?

With humility, can we call on our conscience

And reach for wisdom and remedy, in actuality, to honor their ancestors

And secure the survival and sovereignty of the generations yet alive

And on into the future?

What future will we nurture?

What consciousness will we care to cultivate?

As we transform from pavement to park

What path will we pave?

What future and humane nature will we nurture?

What legacy will we lend these lands

And spend our energies to engender?

A growth of goodness and respect for all creations?

Or the inexorable anthem of greed, annihilation and ignorance?

As we rejoice in this natural renewal, can we reflect and redress

The multitudes of trails of tears and entrails traversing this nation's savage story?

Can we spread the critical human compost laid waste?

The agonies of the ancestors

To solidify a fertile soil of most significant commitment

And resolve for justice and genuine restoration?

As we glance just to the east of here we see our past played before us again

1643-1664

This was "Little Africa" or "Land of the Blacks", spanning more than 100 square city blocks,

(now Chinatown, Little Italy, Soho, Greenwich Village)

The first Black schools, churches, Black owned businesses were right here where we live

Our neighbors--- Do we know of them?

Farms of freed slaves, toiling for the Dutch West India Company

Right about here in this spot where we stand

Do we remember the names of the first 11 slaves taken hostage to these shores?

Some may cue their countries of origin from which they were stolen

Crammed into vessels of living/dying hell, across the waters

Steeped in the stench of their own waste, to a life of cruel servitude

If somehow they survived:

Simon Congo

Paulo d'Angola

Gracia Angola

Pieter San Tome

Anthony Portuguese

Jan Francisco

Big Manuel de Groot

Little Manuel Minuit

Little (Cleyn) Anthony

Jan of Fort Orange

Manuel de Gerrit de Reus (He was hung in 1941, but his rope broke and he was spared)

They built Fort Amsterdam, cleared fields, built roads, homes, farmed and fed the settlers

By debasing, demeaning, defiling, defining Blacks as inferior beings

The white settlers justified their brutal barbarous enslavement

To the pious "Christian" conquerors

And when slaves finally gained their so-called freedom in 1827

It was a consummated, but still incipient step

On a long hard unending road

Of courage, strength and struggle in the quest for equality

As we celebrate our nature-filled good fortune

As we return these traffic lanes, charging in all directions

Claiming to claim them again for mother earth
What on earth will we choose to renew?
What direction and intention will we attune to?
Down what path will we swerve and what master will we serve?

As we restore these exhaustive lanes to life-affirming plantings
What path will we pave?
In this blossoming tip of a triangle
What purpose will we point for posterity
To preserve this precious precarious planet?
What is the nature of this nature we will nurture?
The very roots and depths of our design and determination?
The truth and texture of our intention into future generations?
What will our triangle signify in the larger scheme of auspicious or insidious analogies?
Entitlement? A shady past?
A sharp barbed travesty of brutality, genocide and slavery?
Avarice and empire?
Or instead, a sacred solace?
A trinity of integrity, generosity, wisdom?
Compassion, kindness and community?
A creative Common Ground of respect and magnanimity?
What seeds will we plant and so sow to regain and sustain our earth
Whose earth? Our earth
Do we own it or do we own up?
Willingly Caringly?

We will grow like this growth as we listen and learn from these lands
From the waters, skies, the thunders, trees, the rocks
The tiny creatures who share their home with us here on Mother Earth
Do we notice the resilience and vitality running through each river, vein, vine, each leaf?
The healing inherent in every herb, blossom, and being?
Every blade of sweet grass or buds or bitters that emit their sacred scent
Their nutrients, their nectar, their beauty, their strength
Their essence, their mirror, their message?
Will we hear as they speak in ancient overtones?

Offering abundance, a bounty of possibilities
Reconciliation and restoration
Collective renewal and revival
The power of healing so sorely needed in all our hearts

As we restore this pavement to park
What path will we pave?
What consciousness and courage will we cultivate?
What dedication of honor and vision and humane nature will we nurture?
What nature will we nurture?
What nature will we nurture?