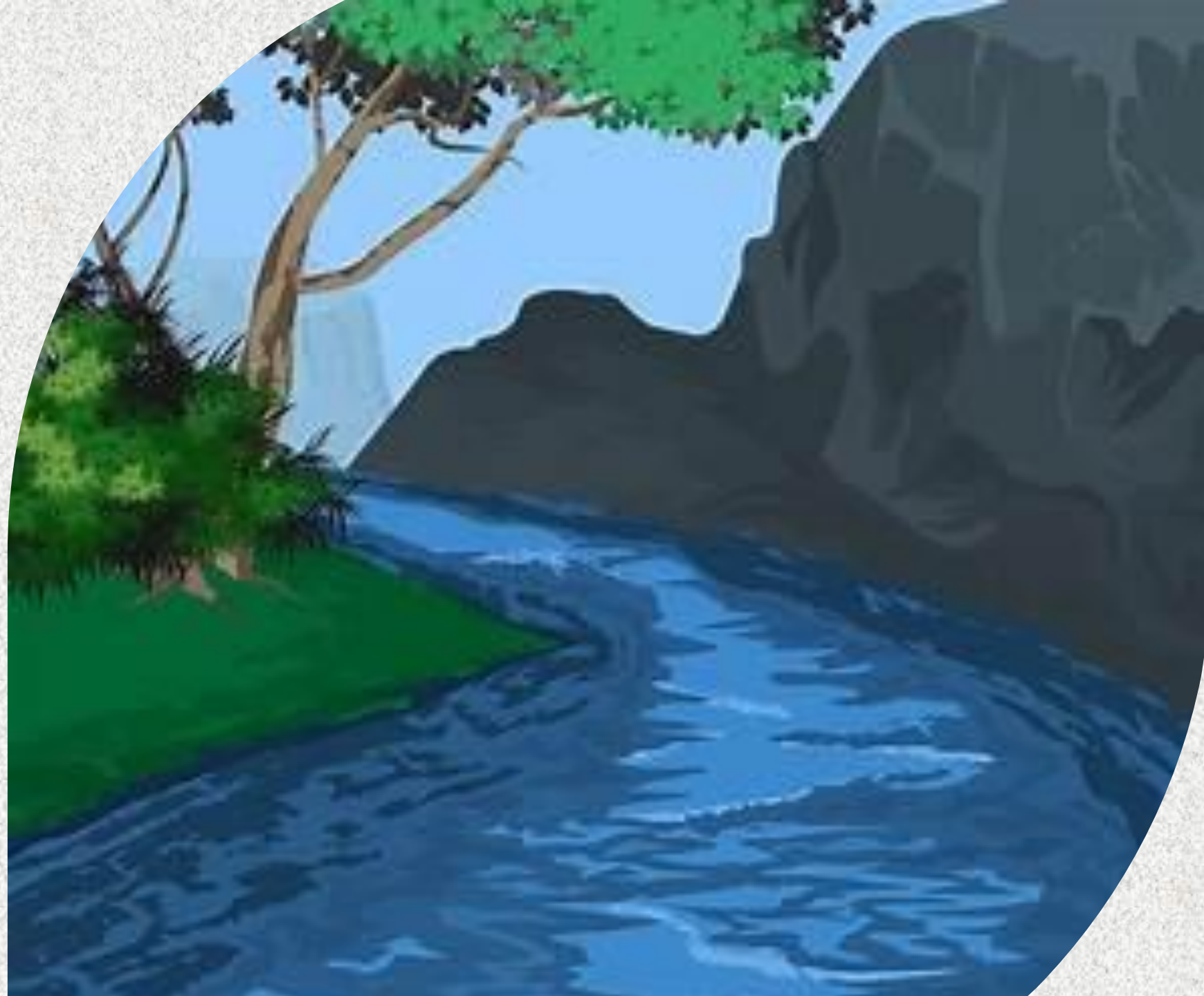


# Big Rivers

Metaphors for the  
World we Live in

Michelle Gorman, RSM  
MELF Cohort 2  
(2022-2023)

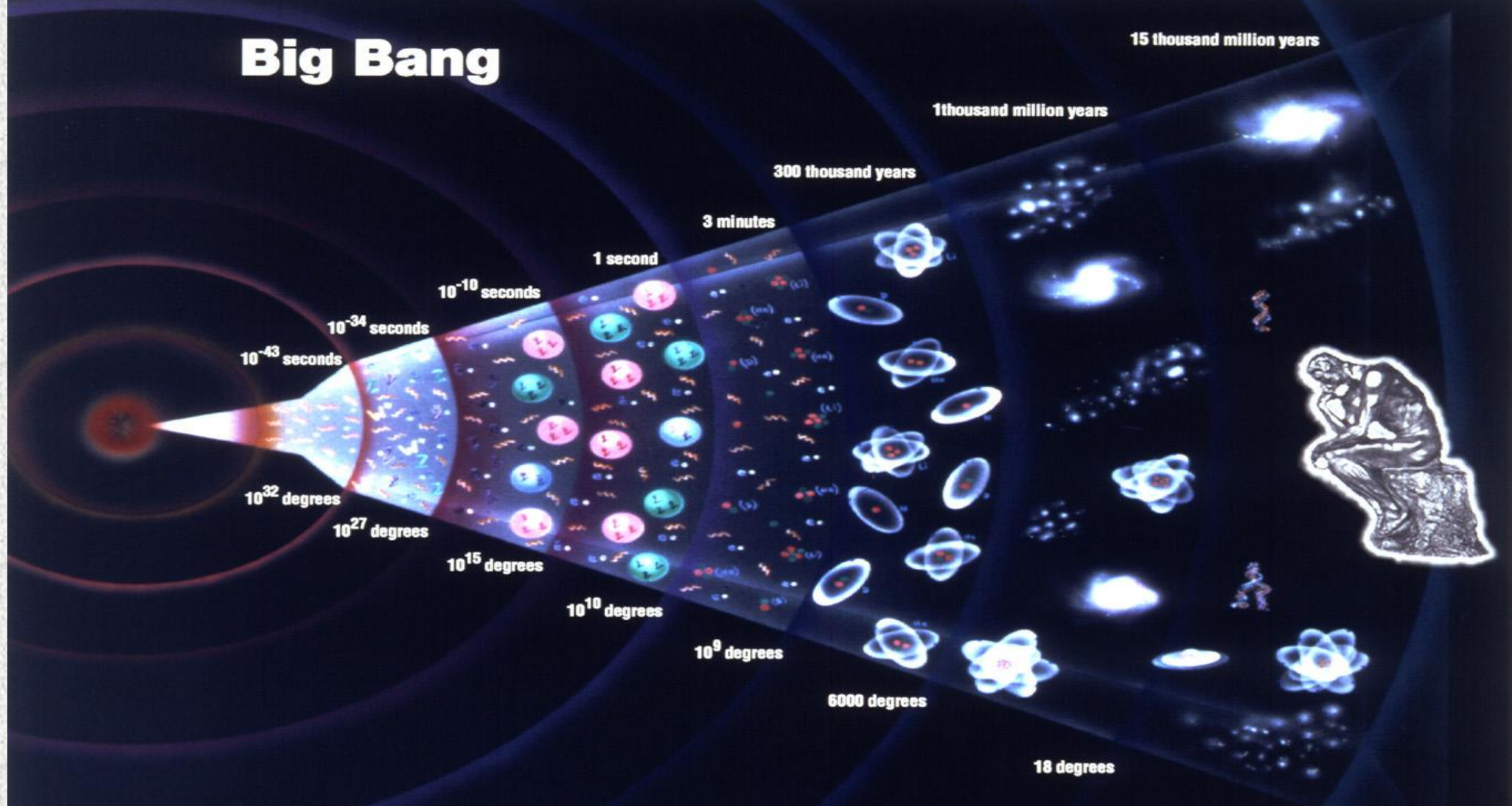


The Day the  
Earth  
Smiled-  
July 19, 2013

View from Saturn (Cassini)  
900 million miles away



# Big Bang



# Earth Cries Out



[This Photo](#)

[CC BY-NC](#)



# Degradation of Earth- Big Rivers

Mississippi River- American Continent

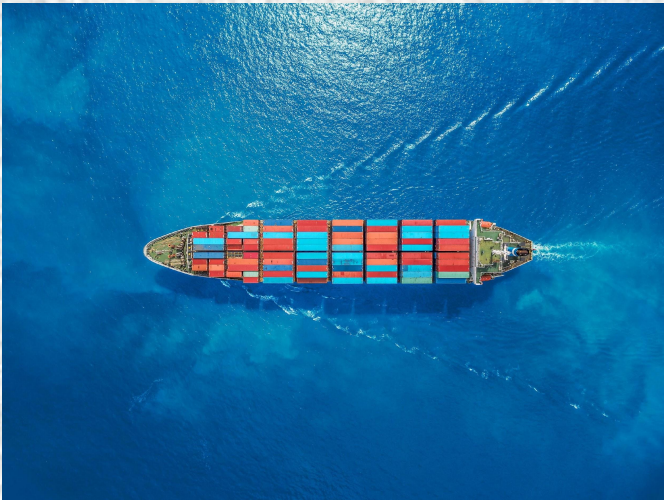
Mekong/Tonle Sap River- Asia

Mara River- Africa

River Shannon- Europe

Martumarra Fitzroy River- Australia

# Mississippi River





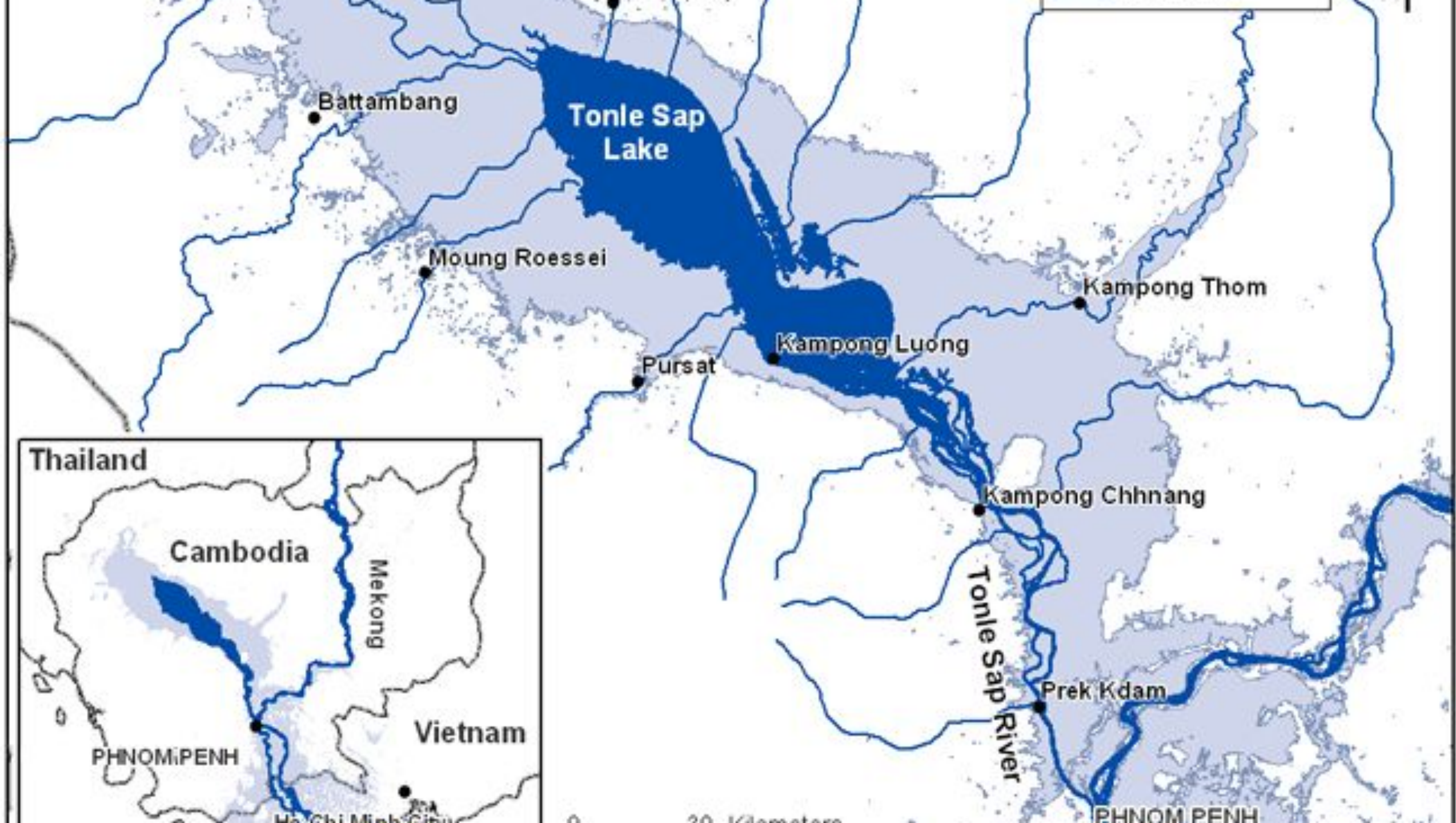


# The Negro Speaks of Rivers

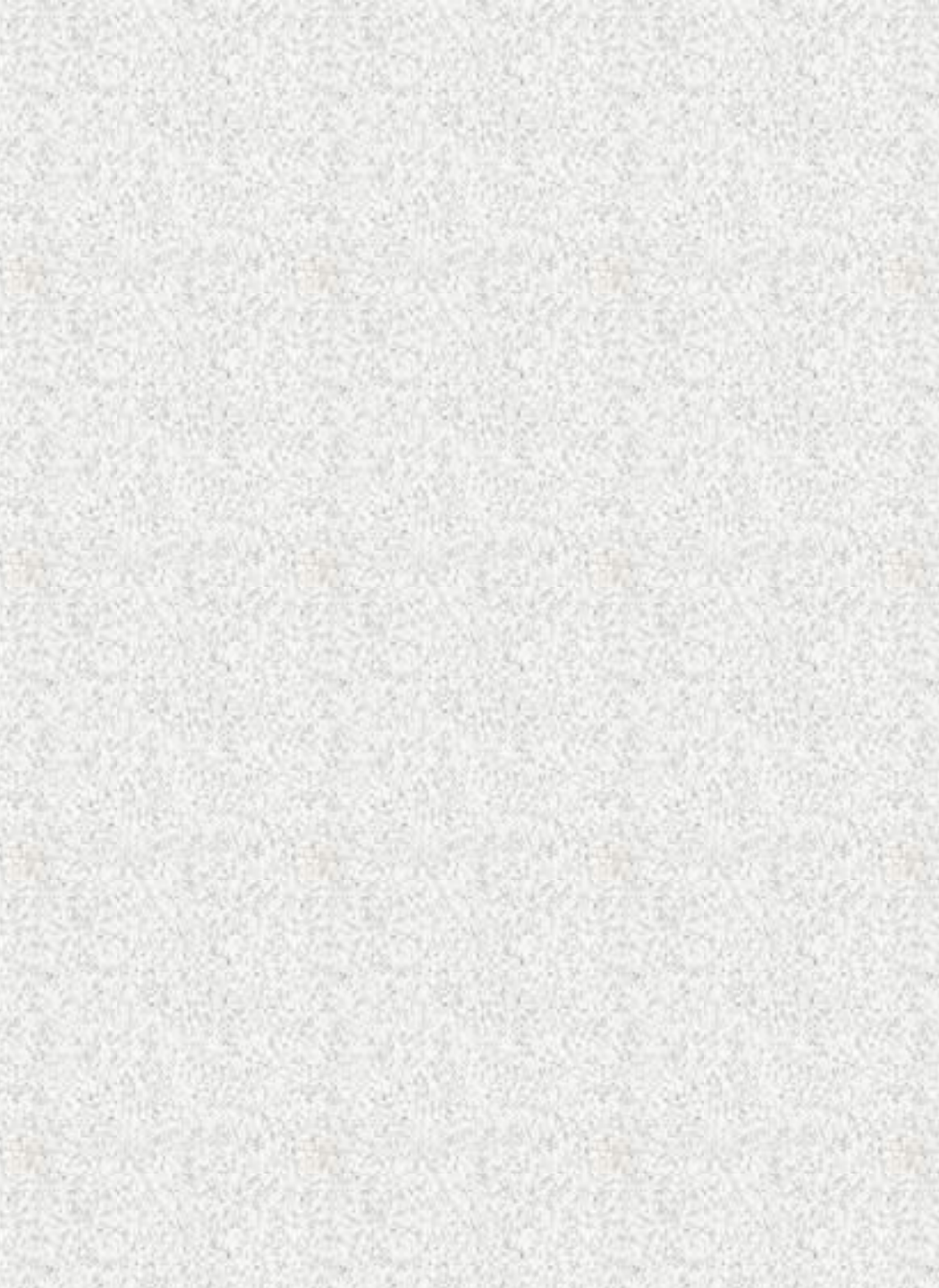
Langston Hughes

*I've known rivers ancient as the world  
and older than the flow of human blood  
in human veins.*

*My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*













[This Photo](#)

[CC BY](#)







[This Photo](#)

[CC BY-SA-NC](#)





This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)









## Fitzroy River Declaration Nov. 3, 2016

- “The Fitzroy River is a living ancestral being and has a right to life. It must be protected for current and future generations and managed jointly by the Traditional Owners of the river.”



# Fitzroy River Declaration

This landmark declaration  
is an expression of

**First Law**

# First Law

- First Law is the traditional Aboriginal system of law and governance that has been developed over thousands of years by Indigenous Australians.



A lush, misty forest scene with a stream flowing over mossy rocks and a large tree trunk in the foreground. The forest is dense with tall, thin trees and a thick canopy of green leaves. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a soft, ethereal glow. The stream is small and clear, with water cascading over large, moss-covered rocks. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

# First Law- Sustainable

First Law focuses on maintaining earth's ecological balance so that all life can prosper.

A landscape of sand dunes and a blue lake under a clear sky. The dunes are light brown and have a rippled texture. The lake is a deep blue color. The sky is a pale, clear blue. On the right side of the image, there are several teal-colored decorative shapes, including a large rounded square, a smaller rounded square, and a circle with a red and white dot inside.

First Law

Operating from a  
sustainable model  
that is Earth-Centered .

# Professor Anne Poelina

## Frequent spokesperson:

- explains that First Law principles are not applied through rules, policies, and procedures where punitive measures influence individual and societal behavior.

**Co-Chair of Religious Studies at Notre Dame U, Australia**



# Stories- Values-Ethics



- Instead, “First Law is applied through stories that impart values and ethics”. These stories help maintain a peaceful, thriving, and co-operative society grounded in love and reciprocity.

# Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council

- 2016: Fitzroy River Declaration.
- In 2018, the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council was formed as a collective governance model.
- Its purpose: to maintain the spiritual, cultural and environmental health of the Fitzroy River catchment, with Anne Poelina as chair.

# Fitzroy River Council

6 Indigenous Nations came together to form the council with the intention to be the first point of contact for governments.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)



# Collaboration and Respect needed



- In 2018, also, the Martuwarra River Council formally met with the WA government in Perth, urging them to support the council as the managers of the Fitzroy River, and to allow them to implement the Fitzroy River Declaration. Much more work needs to be done to
- Achieve collaboration and respect from the political and economic leaders of the area.

# MF River Council

The council “asserts its rights under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.”

Its vision is that the Western Australian (WA) government will enact legislation that formally recognizes First Law and guardianship by Traditional Owner Groups.

## Pause for Reflection

- Have you ever thought of your bioregion, your local river as a living ancestral being? The river as your ancestor?
- Have you ever thought of the river as having rights in and of itself- and not just for your benefit?
- Write a few of your thoughts and or feelings in the chat box.

# Right Brain

•"The passionate right brain, with its magical world of creative visionary thinking, has been mostly sidelined. We have reduced mind to the mental analytical work of the left brain, depriving the world of conscious connectivity."

•Ilia Delio, [Making All Things New](#)

•+

# Songlines

- The indigenous peoples of Australia have not severed that connection to the right brain. In their songlines, which are recorded in traditional songs, stories, art, and dance, they have maintained a connection to their land and culture, thus imparting vital knowledge, values, and wisdom throughout the ages.





# Current Challenges to the Martuwarra Fitzroy Catchment

- Continued recovery from colonialism (First they came for the land.)
- Response to invasion by unjust developments (Now, they are coming for the water.)



- Challenge to implement “forever economies” over short-term profits with destructive impacts.
- Challenge to engage governments and corporate entities to live as planetary citizens.

*We are all indigenous to planet Earth.*

# Solidarity at Home and Abroad

- As Mercy people with connections across the globe, how can we be in solidarity with all creation?
- We can know our bioregion-act locally, think/feel globally.



# Solidarity

Understand better our interdependence.

- For example, can you name all the benefits you receive from within your bioregion? How would you manage without them?
- How are people you know collaborating to maintain a healthy environment?

# What else can we do?

1

Communicate about the environmental neglect and abuses that you see.

2

Be encouraged by those who resist the encroachment of profiteers.

3

Work with others: take photos and write stories about your bioregion; share on FB...

4

Create artwork to illustrate your awareness of the beauty our of which you have emerged.

## And...Look within...

- What do I notice within myself: Are my emotions affected by what I see happening to the health of my bioregion?
- How does the loss of biodiversity affect me?
- Help people move beyond fear by showing the benefits of caring for our earth.
- Don't be distracted by disinformation

# Eight Corporal Works of Mercy (Care for our Common Home)

As Sisters of Mercy and Mercy colleagues, we highly value the Corporal Works of Mercy and have traditionally seen ourselves as performing them for others. Catherine McAuley: Our Mercy congregation grew out of Matthew 25. When I was hungry...

What if we reflect on these works of mercy through the eyes of Earth?

Earth speaks of her Works of Mercy to us...

When you were hungry, your food came from me.

When you were thirsty, my rivers quenched your thirst.

When you were naked, I covered you with my seasons.

When you were homeless, my forests gave you shelter.

When you were sick, my bush medicines healed you.

When you were imprisoned, I let you wander freely without borders.

When I needed healing, you declared an eighth work of mercy to look out for me and care for me. Thank you. That act of kindness may save you.

And in your death, I welcome you back into my essence.

So, I conclude with the 8 Corporal Works  
of Mercy and say with Carly Simon:

*Let the river run;*

*Let all the dreamers wake the nation....*

Our common home needs us now.



# Catherine McAuley

- We must be like the rivers which flow into the sea without losing any of the sweetness of the water.....

