



A CIRCLE OF ALL NATIONS REFLECTION ON GEORGE GRANT'S LAMENT FOR A NATION, AS VIEWED VIA THE LENS OF WILLIAM COMMANDA, CARRIER OF THE SACRED WAMPUM BELTS and ARTICULATOR OF A VISION FOR THE SACRED CHAUDIERE SITE, OTTAWA, CANADA

“There has to be a great noble change” (William Commanda), that “Posterity may know we have not loosely through silence permitted things to pass away as in a dream”. (George Grant, p. 26)

Dr. William Commanda, OC, is the deeply respected and revered late Algonquin Elder, of the Ottawa River Watershed, founder of the *Circle of All Nations*, (a global eco-community dedicated to advancing Indigenous wisdom, environmental stewardship, social justice, racial harmony and peace building), and Carrier of Wampum Belts of sacred and historical importance.

Dr. George Grant is the late academic and renowned Dean of Religious Studies, McMaster University, remembered even today by a former student who says *It's been some time since I read his Lament but I'm sure it's as relevant today as it was in the 60's. Actually his Lament is likely to be more relevant today. He was a fascinating lecturer/professor whose passion brought Greek philosophy alive when he was at Mac.*

Note: We recognize that Grant's Lament exposes many layers in his thinking; here, we are primarily concerned with his quest for the real heart of Canada, in his *Lament for the Nation*.

1. Preamble: The Sacred Wampum Teachings of William Commanda

In 1970, Elder William Commanda became keeper of three sacred wampum shell belts of great spiritual and historical importance. These belts, together with another one that disappeared many decades earlier, were held by his great, great grandfather, Pakinawatik, and they carry testimony of the significant prophecies, agreements and understandings that had guided the Anicinabe peoples for centuries. He heard stories about them from childhood, and they inspired his work over many decades years. In 1987, he began sharing the messages of the Wampum Belts publicly in Canada during the First Peoples/federal/provincial/territorial constitutional debates hosted by then Prime Minister Mulroney (a commitment to the 1982 Canadian Constitution Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms), and he continued to do so with increasing urgency till his death in 2011, at the age of 97. This public animation of the sacred heritage at a significant historical moment is consistent with prophecies that speak of the return of the voice of Indigenous Peoples.

The Sacred Wampum Belt heritage, is clearly emergent with the Algonquin Peoples of the American North East from pre-historical times, and the word *Wampum* comes from the Algonquian language: its meaning is associated with dawn, first light, the east, the morning sun and *enlightenment*. The spiritual and historical interpretations of the Belts are important for Indigenous Peoples across the continent, and, William Commanda believed, since both Canada and the United States are now inhabited by people from all over the world, the messages are relevant for all; and by extension, the global community. Hence he began an active campaign of sharing their messages in the nineties, and with increasing urgency after 9/11. Over the course of the past 25 years, these messages have been embraced by people from all over the world – the countless references on the web attest to their reach. The much larger underlying significance of the heritage lies in its spanning time and place in non-linear, intergrated and emergent ways, reflecting the energy of ontogenesis and becoming – *Encore vivant*, William Commanda would say.

The core messages of the three Wampum Belts are shared here.

The Seven Fires Prophecy Belt

The most ancient one, the Seven Fires Prophecy Wampum Belt, foretold the coming of the new peoples, and the devastating changes they would bring into the lives of the First Peoples. William Commanda is acknowledged as the carrier of the Belt during the unfolding of the Seventh Fire, the time when people would be called upon to make serious choices about relationships with each other and with all the creation of Mother Earth. At one critical level, the core message is about awakening; *poninjigaywin*: forgiveness; and choice. Will we be guided by values of sharing, balance and harmonious co-existence, as the ancient people were? In relating the prophecy, William Commanda helped people make the critical transition towards a global eco community.

The Three Figure Wampum Belt

The Three Figure Wampum Belt, described as the sharing and welcoming belt, was created before the 1700s, and is about equitable sharing; William Commanda's ancestors inscribed their understanding about sharing the grand, natural resources of their native land, their values and ideology with the then newcomers, the French and the English, in the spirit of a confederacy. This *ménage a trois* theme is reiterated later in the relationship of First Peoples with the federal and provincial governments; and then with original settlers and new immigrants; the Indigenous always stand in the centre. The inherent values of respect, responsibility, sharing and friendship remain the elusive quest of our times.

The Jay Treaty Border Crossing Belt

This belt, created in the 1790s underscores the fundamental spiritual message of Indigenous Peoples about interconnectedness: the Elder's people, the *Mamiwinini*, the nomads, belong to North America and as such, they retain a sacred connection and responsibility to the land they are born to, and the right to travel it, "*without molestation*". As Elder Commanda put it, "My territory is as the river flows, as the bird flies and as the wind blows".

A fourth Belt was a part of this bundle; it disappeared in the 1920s; we consider this the Belt of possibilities.

2. George Grant's Lament

By some strange chance Dr. George Grant's *Lament for a Nation – The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1994 edition) came into my hands this week. I had not thought about him in years. Of course, he was an iconic voice I remembered from my days at McMaster University in the 70s. In those days, Dr. Grant was not contemplating me, the multicultural face of Canada. Nor was he thinking about the First Peoples of North America, though he did refer to Indigenous. I was puzzled, and reread the references several times: he was actually writing here about the French Canadians; the point he was making was that they were more rooted here than the British.

Written in 1963, the *Lament* was republished in 1970, and by this time, post the Vietnam War, Grant notes, "Even the Canadian bourgeoisie can see the perhaps unresolvable racial conflict, the expansion and decay of its cities, the increase of military influence in constitutional life, the breakdown between the generations, the effects of a century of environmental spoliation etc. etc. (that is, the dangers of the domination of the American way, *stalking* the public world). Most men, when in a weak position, need immanent hopes to keep alive their will to fight against all odds; ... belief that history was on their side has given them the strength to live with courage in times of difficulty and defeat ...

in an era when most of public men are held by ignoble delusions, generally a mixture of technological progressivism and personal self-assertion” (p. 9).

The *Lament* was republished by Carleton University in 1994, with a foreword by Peter Emberley, Professor of Political Science, attesting to its continued relevance and instructive potential. He noted that we are “perhaps to a greater extent, subject to widespread homogenizing, continentalist forces which have been shaping our destiny for the past two decades. For those whose lives have been deeply affected by massive continental economic restructuring, who have begun to experience the political and social implications of living within the new continental trade region formed under the North American Free Trade Agreement, and who are attempting to navigate between equally powerful globalizing forces and the recrudescence of fragmenting local attachments, Grant’s tocsin (alarm) still warns with unsurpassed clarity of the dangerous shoals surrounding us.” (p. 15).

Emberley notes that Grant was later to call the technological spirit of modernity a “complete ontological package”, meaning that our institutions our programs, our laws, our behaviours, our amusements and our self-understandings were fundamentally echoing its logic. A philosophy of reason as domination over nature, a politics of imperial, bureaucratic administration, a public discourse of efficiency and a sociology of adjustment and equilibrium were forging, as so many specialized arts of modern technology, a new way for us. Grant’s short-hand version of how technology was reshaping us was to speak of its deracinated “universalizing” and “homogenizing” effect. Contained within these terms were complex reflections on the modern dream of universal liberation and the prospect of universal tyranny, and on the moral hopes associated with equality, and the reality of creeping sameness. Taken together, he was to demonstrate, technology involved a fundamental reshaping of the human spirit and the gradual eclipse or transformation of human experiences that in the past had provided us with moral and intellectual ballast (p. 18). The efficiencies of technology “demanded the suppression of local differences, particular loyalties, and credible resistances. Whatever lingering pockets of “autochthony” might declare opposition to the spirit of the regime – sustained by its continental discourse of instrumentality and efficiency – regarded their opposition as nothing more than folly or sentimentality” (p. 19).

This was the *stalking* and this the *ontological package* that William Commanda resisted, and the *immanent* hope was entrenched in his spiritual groundedness, inclusive of the Wampum heritage.

The *Lament* is timeless in many respects, even today instructive in its analysis of the political power brokering, and striking in its anticipation of the developments of the past decades, and the present moment. Here, we are no longer feeling the impact of continentalism alone – this is the age of globalization; and capitalist domination, neoliberalism, racial conflict, military control and environmental spoliation have accelerated with little promise of attainment of the grand dream, or any clear insight into the morass.

In fact, that *ontological package* has “concentrated incomes and wealth among a few, squeezed the middle income strata, and fuelled unparalleled inequalities in income, wealth, and life chances. If there is one consistent indicator of neoliberal governance, it is stalled, if not declining human development and well-being amidst unprecedented economic growth and wealth creation. It is a governing formula that is ripe with all manner of social injustices.” So says researcher Janine Brodie, on *Reforming Social Justice in Neoliberal Times* (2007). Canada has just dropped out of the UN’s 10 most developed countries list on its human development index. On the global scale, the realities are even more lamentable.

Grant writes that the critical feature of the age of modernity, driven by the American empire, is the ontology of “*being as technology*”. Grant was preoccupied by the succumbrance of a sovereign Canada to the American demands. He also examined “Corporate capitalism and the processes whereby power is legitimized: In no society is it possible for many men to live outside the dominant assumptions of their world for very long. Where can people learn independent views, when newspapers and television throw at them only processed opinions? In a society of large bureaucracies, power is legitimized by conscious and unconscious processes” p. 57.

George Grant’s *Lament* is a political meditation, and it reaches beyond this nation and the defeat of Canadian nationalism, and his times; his question, *Were there phenomena in our own heritage which could sustain some resistance and provide some moral ballast to the apparent soulless world order forming around us?* is relevant here and now, and the answer William Commanda offers spans time and space.

In his *Lament*, Grant ponders, “If there had been an influential group that seriously desired the continuance of the country after 1940, it would have needed the animation of some political creed that differed from the capitalist liberalism of the United States. Only then could they have acted with sufficient decision to build an alternative nation on this continent....But no such tradition existed among any of the important decision-makers in Canada. The only Canadians who had a profoundly different tradition from capitalist liberalism were the French Canadians” p. 60.

But there was. The Indigenous were invisible in the Canadian nation building politics of the forties and the sixties. However, that does not mean that they were inactive. Despite the devastation of colonization, decimation by war, disease, poverty and spiritual assault, despite being torn apart by land division and expropriation, and genocidal residential school abuses, the Indigenous peoples rallied repeatedly to challenge changes in their homeland.

3. William Commanda's *Ballast*

Grant's use of the word *deracinated* in his description of the homogenous and universal technological state leads us directly to the contemplation of the Indigenous assessment of technology, as espoused by William Commanda, as carrier of the *Seven Fires Prophecy Wampum Belt*; far from being *deracinated*, he is most renowned for affirming rootedness in the land, and for introducing others to the ontology of relationship with the living Earth as compared to the headlong rush to technology and mechanism. His interconnectedness with Nature, indeed his emergence with Nature, provided him with the *ballast* to resist the *soulless world order forming around*.

Now, the Sacred Wampum Belts were not in his community during his early years; yet, they were a deep part of his very own family's history; his father Alonzo Commanda had told him from childhood about the relics carried by his legendry great, great grandfather, Chief Luc-Antoine Pakinawatik, the one who had negotiated the reserve at Lac Desert, now Kitigan Zibi (note that this sanctuary for the protection of Algonquin peoples, culture, language in the face of growing numbers of newcomers was created in 1853, before there was a Canada, a Quebec or an Ontario). Further, his grandfather, Chief Louis Commanda, and great grandfather Chief Pete Tenesco, also played direct roles in the Wampum story. William Commanda himself was already animating the wampum energy, even before they found him.

His political perspective was grounded in no uncertainty about his rightful position as *Mamiwinini of Turtle Island*, as his peoples described the continent of North America – as First Person. At the UNESCO Millennium International Summit on Arts and Culture, he said, *I am in the earth, wind and waters; I am as the bird flies, the wind blows, the water flows*; and, in the National Film Board documentary, *Encounter With an Algonquin Sage*, he states *I am North America*. As carrier of the Sacred Wampum Belts, he assumed a certain profound responsibility to the land and the peoples – his own people as well as the newcomers who had come to occupy the land. While the significance of the Sacred Wampum Belts is vast, in essence they meant some core things to him. The most ancient one, the Seven Fires Prophecy Wampum Belt, iterates a message about the time when people would be called upon to make serious choices about its relationship with Mother Earth and each other. So he worked to help people make that transition. He did that through all the years that George Grant was writing about, the 40s and 60s, in the 90s, and ever more urgently and passionately during the last decade of his life, the post 9/11 years.

Following North American Indigenous interventions in Geneva in the 1920s, after the First World War, the persistent voice from the land was heard again in the mid 1940s. Huron Indigenous activist Jules Sioui was architect of the North American Indian Nations Government, comprising Indigenous leadership from both Canada and the United States. In 1946, he challenged the United Nations Secretary General Trygve Halvden Lie (1946 – 53) with petitions for a voice at the global table, posing the question: *What are the immigrants doing in our seats?* (referring to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and President Harry S. Truman). This effrontery was dealt with imprisonment. He

challenged enlistment, enfranchisement and infringement on Indigenous sovereignty. Later, he was charged for challenging the demand to swear allegiance to the Queen: asserting sovereignty, he stated she is equal to me in the eyes of God; William Commanda, who attended the court case in Quebec City, remembered that the visiting British Judge Gibson, who tried this case of international dimension, told the jury, *You saw he would not swear allegiance to the Queen; you have no choice but to find him guilty*; the sentence was appealed and challenged successfully, but Sioui was held in prison for eleven months; he went on a hunger strike for over 78 days and, thanks to William Commanda's interventions, he was eventually released, but, tragically, broken in body. This story did not get the media attention: Indigenous Peoples were rendered invisible in the story of Canada. This struggle for Indigenous participation, commenced with the birth of the United Nations only finally materialized in 2007, when Australia, Canada and the United States became the last signatories to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Other Indigenous voices from North America contributed to this challenge: the Hopi, via messenger Thomas Banayca, delivered four messages to the United Nations *House of Mica* – first in the forties, and last in 1993.

William Commanda served as Supreme Chief of the North American Indigenous Nations Government from 1952 till his death. Though its integrity was compromised by government manipulations, he retained and affirmed its fundamental conviction of Indigenous responsibility and right to his land till his death; as such, he assumed stature of *Statesman Emeritus*, and eventually, was appointed Officer of the Order of Canada in 2010. (Intriguingly enough, William Commanda died in 2011, on August 2, the birth date of Jules Sioui; and it was Jules Sioui who proclaimed in 1945 that June 21 was to be Indian Day – the then Governor General of Canada, Romeo LeBlanc, made that official in 1996; William Commanda's daughter, Evelyn Dewache, offered the welcome and prayer at Rideau Hall, and, Donald Marshall Junior, the renowned Mi'kmaq justice and rights activist, another staunch supporter of William Commanda's efforts, was amongst the many Indigenous folk there at this significant residence).

Yes, the Indigenous effort to impact the definition of nation was brave, passionate and persistent. It was also inclusive of a fervent desire to protect the land from ceaseless exploitation. Already in the 1940s, the North American Indigenous voice was raising the cry about environmental degradation and climate change, submitting a petition to this effect to the United Nations under the leadership of the Hopi; the Indigenous voices drew the attention of scientist, Albert Einstein, and Aldo Leopold, the American father of environmentalism. Here in Canada, it was William Commanda's own Uncle Gabriel Commanda who was penning letters to Ottawa about the environmental abuses of the hunters, trappers and tree cutters. The first internationally acknowledged conservationist was an Algonquin woman, Anaheareo Bernard. But they were shadowy ghosts in the limelight of the likes of Grey Owl. As *primitives*, their voices were annihilated or subsumed. In 1993, as Hopi messenger Thomas Banayca delivered their last message to the UN, a major storm and flood erupted, and marked the launch of the UN Decade for the Culture of Indigenous Peoples; William Commanda was there with his Wampum Belts.

Over the past century, the Indigenous voice persistently demanded political presence and equality at the global stage. William Commanda, an avid student and historian, knew that in 1492 Pope Alexander VI and European kings had laid the foundation for the colonization and extermination of non-European peoples; he knew the North American Indigenous population fell from an estimated 72 million to 4 million in a few centuries. He also knew that in 1492, Franciscus Di Vittoria, founder of modern international law, had affirmed that the Indians were the true owners of the land, and that the “pearls of the seas” belonged to them; this is where “Aboriginal Right” takes its roots in North America. Four hundred years ago, Samuel de Champlain met his Algonquin ancestor of the Ottawa River Watershed, Tessouat, acknowledged leader in the American North East, and they struck the first recorded alliance between the newcomers and the people of Turtle Island, as the continent was called, to guide travel, trade and exchange of resources. By the 1700s, his ancestors had created the sacred *Three Figure Sharing Wampum Belt*, agreeing to share values, land and grand natural resources in three equal parts with the newcomers, then the French and English; this sovereignty principle was later affirmed in the Royal Proclamation of 1763.

William Commanda was also well aware that Europe first after the 1500s and later after the first and second world wars emerged from the darkness through the exploitation of the grand natural resources of the Americas: the gold, furs, and wood and minerals. And yes, he was well aware of the hanging of Louis Riel, the Indigenous leader who created the first provisional government in Canada; in fact, he performed a pipe ceremony at his grave. He was fully aware of the exclusion of the Indigenous voice from the public debate about the Canadian nation.

Ironically, the sixties, when Grant was contemplating the nation, were in fact times when First People were regrouping once again in gatherings across the continent, to reassert their place on the land. William Commanda was a central player, hosting historical unification gatherings on either side of the central river of his territory, in 1967 in Eganville, Ontario and 1969 on his ancestral land at Bitobi Lake, Quebec. Chief of his community, he welcomed the new Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to Maniwaki in 1968. The Maniwaki Chamber of Commerce wanted to prepare a speech for the Chief; but he preferred to offer his own words: he welcomed the new Prime Minister to “my Indian territory and to my country”. Pierre Trudeau graciously accepted the welcome. The legendary photo where the Prime Minister insisted on them sharing a plate of beans together resonated with anticipation of the energy and promise of exchange of the *friendship* Wampum Belt. They engaged in a passionate political discussion, about justice, rights, immigrants, voting and taxes. William Commanda believed the Prime Minister understood the concerns and aspirations he expressed – undoubtedly, this exchange contributed to the overturning of the infamous 1969 Indian Affairs White Paper aimed at assimilating the people, and William did note some shift in national policies and practices thereafter.

4. William Commanda's *Intent*

The 1700s Three Figure Wampum Belt was created as the Sharing and Welcoming Belt, its three figures signifying that the Indian in the centre was welcoming the newcomers, then the French and English, to their lands, agreeing to share their values and their grand nature resources in the on-going evolution of the country; the fact that this was considered a sacred agreement was noted in the symbol of the Vatican. In modern times, the triad reflects the First Peoples, the federal and provincial/territorial governments, and First Peoples, the original settlers and the new immigrants.

For William Commanda, the value of respect for the grand natural resources was of primary importance, as was revealed when the Wampum Belts were brought out in public the first time, at that First Ministers Constitutional Conference hosted by Prime Minister Mulroney in 1987; he noted that the waters and lands were polluted everywhere, and he demanded that this be remedied; he himself worked unceasingly to advance respect for Mother Earth, irrespective of the actions of government, and inspired many, including non-Indigenous in this work. He also remained deeply committed to the welcome his ancestors had offered the newcomers – and so till his death affirmed the *friendship* motif of the Belt – the holding of hands. Noting further the historical wars between the French and English, he also affirmed his ancestors' peace-building responsibilities, as inscribed in the Belt. In this manner, he reinforced the message that the First Peoples remain the central force in the land; for him, it was a sacred responsibility and therein were linked the *immanent hope* and, yes, *intent!* Beyond that, the values of generosity, respect, balance, honour, responsibility, health, healing and love created the Canadian social safety net – most will agree they came from oppressive conditions elsewhere.

In his book, *What is a State*, Bob Jessop offers this interesting observation: Isaiah Berlin, in his study of Tolstoy, compared the hedgehog, who knew “one big thing” to the fox, who knew many things (p. 45). The scientific, rational orientation fixing homogeneity and sameness, and universalizing, in ever-expansive ways, he finds, was stripping nature and people of creativity, and standardizing sterility. In his animation of his heritage, grounded in the earth-emergent biodiversity, William Commanda projected complexities, inter-connection, contextuality, vagary, mutuality, stimulation, evolution and open-endedness. This is the *indigenous* current he sparked in countless people of all social, cultural and economic and educational backgrounds, through his animation of the Wampum heritage and *a circle of all nations*.

Grant posits that “all ruling classes are produced by the societies they are required to rule. In the 1960s, state capitalism organizes a technological North America. The ruling classes are those that control the private governments (that is the corporations) and those that control the public government which coordinates the activities of these corporations....The civilians and soldiers who run its military operations increasingly crowd its corridors of power....Our rulers, particularly those who enjoy wielding power, move in and out of our corporations, the civil service, and politics” (p. 27/28). In his analysis of NATO, he notes that our “military is most directly an errand boy for the

Americans”; American hegemony was obvious. Almost fifty years later, Grant’s words still ring true.

He notes further that a nation does not remain a nation only because it has its roots in the past: “Memory is never enough to guarantee that a nation can articulate itself in the present. There must be a thrust of intention into the future ... national articulation is a process through which human beings form and re-form themselves into a society to act historically. This process coheres around the intention realized in the action” (p. 31).

William Commanda, I think, would be invoking an *intent*, as well as a prayer – well, a prayer and a challenge, much as he did in the early days that Grant refers to. Despite the challenges of colonization and colonialism, William Commanda never ceased to assert his presence as the original inhabitant of this land, and for him, that presence carried an inalienable responsibility, first to the land itself, and then to all its occupants. The Sacred Three Figure Wampum Belt was a testament to this responsibility – the Indigenous were assigned the duty to draw the hands of the newcomers together in the spirit of welcome and sharing, consistent with the values of their ancestors and the prayer, *Ginawaydaganuc, We are all connected*. By drawing others into the animation of Wampum Belt, he was extending to them the deep connection with Nature; he trusted that that would in time enable others to be like *Fox*. This fundamental orientation by extension embraced the globe; as we have noted, William Commanda was attuned to the global enterprise too, much like George Grant and his readers.

William Commanda saw further and much earlier than most, into a future of unceasing capitalism, exploitation, corruption, environmental degradation, species destruction, resource depletion, climate change and war; he also saw the mental and moral demise looming. He could see through *baffle-gab*. He also knew that hope lay in creativity and the regenerative potential of life, not merely in political parties.

Grant explains his use of the word *Lament* for his political meditation: to lament is to cry out at the death or at the dying of something loved, when one despairs deeply, he wrote; when one truly despairs, he adds, one commits suicide.

With his motto, *Encore Vivant*, despite the oppression, injustice, and overwhelming odds against it, William Commanda projected that *intent*. It is in his vision for the Sacred Chaudiere Site that he presented an eco-political manifesto and road map to a future of hope for all who now occupy his homeland.

5. William Commanda's Prayer

In essence, it is as described below:

The Vision: Dr. Commanda's bold four-fold vision calls for

- 1) Freeing the Chaudière Falls – release from the stranglehold of the industrial era
- 2) Creating a City Park & Historic Interpretive Centre – for all Canadians
- 3) Building a Peace Building Meeting Site – an eco think tank
- 4) Building an Aboriginal Centre – for First Peoples

Details:

1. It is a vision of potentially significant international influence for symbolic reconciliation with Nature, both water and land, by undamming the sacred Chaudière Falls to the extent possible, and returning it to its former magnificence; planting the Chaudière Island with trees and creating an educational eco-city park in the heart of the country, expressive of both of its history, and its future, offering a modern day reclaimed green sanctuary and pow wow grounds to offset concrete urban sprawl; it calls for developing a historic interpretative centre to commemorate the history of settlement pre and post contact: ceremony, ancient trade routes, exchange of goods, logging, hydro electric power, industrial development, inventions etc.

2. Consistent with the ancient history as meeting place, and current need for creative meeting spaces designed to serve as collaborative think tanks for reflective contemplation on global and local issues inspired by the UN Decade for Culture of Peace, for international cross-cultural exchange and training, the remaining portion of the vision calls for a Tipi Village pod-style conference hotel on the western portion of Victoria Island, fully accessible within the core area of the capital city.

3. Finally, for almost four decades, the Eastern portion of Victoria Island has been designated the site for an Aboriginal Centre; from 1998, Elder Commanda worked to develop a vision for the Centre; Aboriginal Architect Douglas Cardinal, with support from Canadian Heritage, developed the conceptual architectural plans; Elder Commanda negotiated a draft Memorandum to Cabinet with a consultant for the National Capital Commission, and at the Circle of All Nations International Gathering of August 2006, the NCC expressed full support for this proposal; in 2010, the City of Ottawa endorsed his vision.

4. The entire site will be a great attraction for Aboriginal peoples, citizens of the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau, the country at large, children, new Canadians and international tourists.

5. Though damaged over the years, the sacred Chaudière site of the Algonquin Peoples remains a beautiful natural and national treasure waiting to be recognized and honoured.

6. Elder Commanda's vision also offers a unique opportunity to Correct Mistakes of History and Look Towards the Future.

7. It is recognized that this work spans many federal departments, jurisdictions and responsibility centres. It needs a collective and collaborative national will and leadership to create the momentum for its successful realization

We now need *national articulation to reform ourselves as a society*.

William Commanda saw, as George Grant did not, that the Indigenous are the glue to restore the broken world, and he blessed the seeding of this work at the Sacred Chaudiere Site, the sacred meeting place of his own direct ancestors. Countless Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples lit that fire with him; rather than a *lament*, he offered a prayer and challenge that all come to understand the urgency of call, *before the end of time*. This is the “thrust of intention into the future” that Grant sought so fervently. Indeed, even Grant’s reference to Milton’s Abdiel, “Unshaken, unsecluded, unterrified” prefigures the stature of William Commanda (p. 32).

He exhorted us tirelessly to “Come together, with one heart and one mind, with one love and one determination” to create *A Circle of All Nations, A Culture of Peace*, and ignite a legacy of *hope* for the future, not just for the nation, but for the world.

How will we choose?

A Sombre Post Script Regarding the Sacred Chaudiere Site

Today we learn about European Malls, Little Amsterdams and orange bicycles prescribing the new pathways of occupation of the ancient sacred gathering place. Several individuals are challenging ownership issues, Indigenous land and title rights, transfer of “public” lands within the heart of the National Capital Region by the National Capital Commission, privatization, massive condominium development plan, and capitalist and consumer culture entrenchment at a singular sacred site of critical natural and human heritage importance within the capital city of a country that is now home to the world. Grandfather Commanda saw this energy in his homeland through out his life – this is what he wrote himself: *Kanadian: they come get it.*

A critical analysis of the past struggles at the site have been presented in the 2011 Masters Thesis by Carleton University student Eric Smith (www.asinabka.com) – even down to the bicycle theme reflected in Bent Flyvbjerg case study and academic text, *Making Social Science matter*, that is referenced (*An urban epi-centre for decolonization: Abstract – This thesis explores urban decolonization in Canada through a critical case analysis of the colonial encounter in Ottawa. The Circle of All Nations, a community of Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies who find inspiration and leadership in Algonquin Elder William Commanda, illuminates the practice of land-based ceremony, which is vital to Indigenous communities’ survival, urban or otherwise. The blindness of coloniality toward Indigenous ways of being and their cultural significance is formed by a rupture of the intersubjective relation between people, and between people and places. For this reason most importantly, the building of the Asinabka Indigenous Centre on Victoria Island, while a capital development project, is also a crucial manifestation of effective decolonial counterwork. It materializes relationality in a form and context that cannot be anything but visible to the colonial gaze.*

Yet nothing deters the *stalking* of the *ontological package*.

Grant notes that “The Canadian economy was part of the total resources of North America; Canada was an undeveloped frontier within that total, and the capital necessary for that development would come largely from the United States; that North America was committed to a capitalist structure in which the control of production would be in the hands of “private” corporations, while the government would only play a supervisory role (p. 54). Grant notes the shift in Canada’s role in the Atlantic triangle (Canada, US and Europe) from exporter of raw materials, in its early years, to the role of *branch–plant* of American capitalism. In fact, he was discussing the discusses the structured, hegemonic planning mentality driving the hierarchical, imperial, large scale capitalism mapping the continent; Canada, he decried, served as lackey to the dominant power in the homogenization of economic practices.

In 2010, when William Commanda presented his comprehensive report on the vision for Victoria Island, he wrote this:

When my ancestors first met Philomen Wright at the Sacred Chaudière Site on the Ottawa River in 1800, and asked by what right he cut down the trees and took the land, the stranger drew a paper from his pocket and read “The Indians have consented to relinquish all claim to the land, in compensation for which they receive annual grants from the Government, which shall be withheld if they molest settlers.” This paper, my ancestors saw as a big “loup garou”, an indescribable monster supposed to have supernatural powers, and in my own lifetime, I have experienced the deep fear this reference brings to native peoples.

Ironically, on his deathbed, Philomon Wright himself said, “When I look back over the past achievements of my life they are of no profit when viewed in the light of eternity. The sun that has lighted our way is going down in a cloud – a dark, dark cloud!” Indeed an ominous statement, and we are all now beginning to fear its implications (ref. *The White Chief of the Ottawa* by Bertha Wright Carr Harris.)

When William Commanda first met Marcel Beaudry, then Chair of the National Capital Commission, in 2004, who claimed to own the site, *he* asked *him* to show him papers to prove his claim; he and his team of lawyers were not able to do that. It is still the unsundered, unceded, unconquered lands of William Commanda’s own family.

William Commanda, those he inspired and countless researchers are trying hard to do that – deter the *stalking* of the *ontological package*; and to help us learn see patterns from the past to predict future ramifications and implications, and to map new trails home to the Sacred Meeting Grounds.

In 2008, William Commanda wrote:

I am not an economist, but it seems to me that there are some fair principles, consistent with government practices, that must be explored to ensure First Peoples receive our fair share of our grand natural resources. This will also safeguard us from violating our fundamental sacred principle – that we belong to Mother Earth, and we cannot sell our Mother; it is not right that we are obliged to accept the language and parameters of governments that do not understand our deeper preoccupations with *Mother Earth and All Our Relations*, in negotiating a rightful place for our children.

We have within our current fiscal structures principles and mechanisms to address these wrongs:

- Distribution of resources per person as per the federal formula – for education, health and social programs;
- Equalization principles, depending on the circumstances of the communities/reserves, as with provinces;
- Government service transfers, as per Nunavut, for Aboriginal Organizations;
- Floating scale for royalties for local/provincial/territorial resources;

- Remedial funds for historic injustices, such as the Residential School legacy, as per the Japanese or Chinese settlements.

When you combine per person funds, funds for equalization, governance, royalties and remediation, you move to a fair range for settlement of indigenous grievances, with underlying principles that also serve to remove from the minds of Canadians at large the erroneous notion that we are welfare recipients. If Aboriginal Peoples constitute one tenth of the population, and the federal budget is gestimated roughly at 500 billion dollars, then the variation between a one third (equal) and a one tenth (equitable) share runs between 167 billion to 50 billion dollars, and the room for fair redistribution is broad and transparent.

With such principles guiding resource distribution, we will have the opportunity to recover our heritage and values on our own terms and ensure they impact the evolution and development of this country, and benefit all. We will have the opportunity to redevelop our sacred relationship with the land and its resources, and our prayer for the land will strengthen Mother Earth.

In my *Circle of All Nations* network, I see increasing numbers of non-Aboriginal peoples from across the globe searching for the sustaining wisdom of the Indigenous Peoples – and now many realize economic development is not the only way forward. Achieving justice for the First Peoples will ensure that we live with dignity, and Canadians with self-respect. Then, with the foundations of our relationships healed and strengthened, we will together create a vibrant and viable *Circle of All Nations and Culture of Peace*, and leave a fitting legacy for all our children.

We are living in times of prophecy, and it is time for the voice of Indigenous Peoples to be shared again. This is the legacy, the gift of the First Peoples, to all who now occupy this land.

It is because of these considerations that William Commanda developed the vision for the Sacred Chaudiere Site – Countless people who understood the depth of the vision realize it is the safeguard for the nation that George Grant called for.

Again the question of the Sacred Seven Fires Prophecy arises, like the Thunderbird from the mists of the sacred waters: How will we choose?

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