

## **Indigenous Peoples of Canada**

### **Hard Truths - Video 2**

John Croutch:

Yeah, all through my life, you know, people would confide in me, about their feelings about First Nations people. And I hid it. I didn't know how to deal with it; I wasn't equipped to handle that. I am more so now, but as a child I wasn't able to handle that and the way it manifested in my behaviour was that I realized quite young - because there was nothing written about First Nations people in the newspapers. The only thing you knew about Indians was what you saw in the movies or on television, right? So that was our only insight into Aboriginal people, except for, like, the First Nations kids that came in from Wasauksing First Nations to the school. And like at that time in the sixties, right, children were streamed into... So all the Aboriginal kids were streamed into Shops [practical job training], you know. They weren't allowed to, they really weren't encouraged to develop like a, you know, like into academics, right? You know, go on to university. You know the best they could ever hope for was like to become a plumber or something. I saw that, you know, I recognized that quite young and it got to the point where we had student/teacher meetings; I didn't want my mom going, you know. I thought that by having my father come everyone would know that I was a white guy, and I wouldn't get streamed, right, into, you know - like I didn't want to be a plumber; I wanted to go to university.

Susan Blight:

In terms of systemic racism in Canada, it's my opinion that the settler-colonial system relies on the dehumanization of indigenous people. The way that works is that in order for settler-colonialism as a system - and that's the system we live in in Canada - to exist, you have to kind of systematically erase indigenous people. Now they've tried to do that physically, but the other way that they've also tried to do that is to take away our humanity. So we've been sort of systematically prevented from telling our own stories and talking about our ways and how we do things. And often times those stories have been either appropriated or told by someone who's not indigenous. In terms of the dehumanization of indigenous people, that works on a variety of levels in Canadian society. So when you prevent people from being able to tell their own stories you can then inject whatever narrative it is that you want, and people will believe it because they're not hearing any other kind of counter-narrative. In Canada that narrative has been that indigenous people

are wards of the state; that we receive handouts from the government; that we are, like, you know, all of the bad stereotypes we are: alcoholics; we are more prone to violence. These things cannot be - are not statistically true. And it also relies on a kind of erasure of the colonial legacy of Canada. So what's happening is you're believing these things but never considering: what are the reasons for that? Why are - why is there a higher representation of Aboriginal people in the homeless population of Toronto? Why? Well, we can think about residential schools; we can think about the Sixties Scoop. We can think about land dispossession; we can think about the number of people who've been disenfranchised from their communities for a variety of reasons. Those are things that - that kind of narrative is not often told in the media.

I personally think that when - that that trajectory is sort of changing. I think the more time goes on, the more power indigenous people have to tell their own stories, the more media we have of our own, the more - higher profile people speaking about these things and telling the truth, the more change happens. But for a very long time, we weren't allowed to tell our stories. The acclaimed author Lee Maracle tells the story about the very first book she ever published. Now this is a woman who was one of the first Aboriginal people to ever be published in Canada, one of the first Aboriginal people to ever go to university, you know - she's a great, seminal author who's won - she won the Premier's Award in 2014 - she tells the story about when she went to publish her first book, she brought it to a publisher. They looked at it; they said, "This is fantastic but we're not going to publish it." And she said, "Why is that?" and they said, "Because Indians don't read." So she actually had to go out and get - she tells the story - she had to go out and get signatories, like people to sign a petition, and she got 800 people to sign a petition, saying they would buy the book if it was published.

Verne Ross:

They would say, "All you people", and then I have to kind of, you know, interject on that, and say like "I'm not sure exactly what you mean by 'all you people'." And I think that they just don't know. Some of them feel embarrassed about it because they just don't know how to approach it. So I kind of help them bridge that. "Do all people live on the reserves?", you know. And that, yes, the negative side would be "You're a bunch of boozers", all that; "You take off as soon as you get your paycheque". Mind you that happened, when I worked first at the hospital! "They're not open today; they got paid; they must be all on a big party." We laughed! We laughed when we heard that. We didn't take a defence to it. But we came back to it, is how to readdress that and make it an a positive, educational approach, and that's

what we did. Stereotypes are damaging. They hurt people. They put labels on you, big time.

Gail Maurice:

I was recently at a gathering and residential school came up - I don't know how it came up, but it was - we were all on some sort of an outing - and I told the person, "Yeah, I went to a residential school" because we were I guess sharing our education, and she goes "oh"; she says, "Is that like boarding school?" And I said, "No. It's not like boarding school." And she goes, "Oh - what's residential school, then, if it's not like boarding school?" I'm doing this - I'm trying to do a WASPy [white Anglo-Saxon Protestant] accent - and I said "oh, it's..." - you know it wasn't the place to explain, right? So I just said, "Oh, go home and Google it or look it up on the internet - residential school system with Aboriginal people." So she said, "Okay." But - and she was Canadian; she was born in Canada; she's been here all her life, you know, yet she doesn't know what the residential school is. That's what's amazing.