Indigenous Peoples of Canada

Resilience - Video 1

Verne Ross:
I remember one time that did happen. I was sitting on a bench, I think it was up on - yeah I think it was around Adelaide and University Avenue, and it's in between, there's benches in between the main streets there. And I was just sitting there, minding my own business, you know, and this woman came up to me and gave me $5. And I said, "Oh, gee, that's ever nice of you." And she said, "Oh, you look like you need it. You look like you're very poor - you're a poor Native, you know?" And I said, "Oh my", and I told her, I said, "It's really nice of you, but I'm doing fine," I told her, and I said, "But maybe you can give that $5 to someone else, you know. Not to insult you, whatever, or offend you," I said, "but I'm doing alright", I told her.

Gail Maurice:
When *Pocahontas* came out - the cartoon [movie], animation - I was walking down the street, and my hair was long at the time. And I'm walking down the street and I see this little girl with her dad coming towards me, and the dad's holding her hand; she's about six years old. She's walking down the street and all of a sudden her eyes meet mine, and she looks at me and she's like… And in my head I'm going "Oh my God, oh my God" which I knew what she was thinking, right? But it's like - I thought, no, it can't be. But she's like, and you could feel her breath as she's walking towards me, walking towards me, and her dad is not aware because he's like - but all of a sudden she looks at me and she's goes, "Daddy! Pocahontas!." And I looked at the dad, and the dad looked at me; he could have just died; his face went red. And the little girl said it so innocently, it was just.. I mean, I said "It's okay", you know, it's because to her Pocahontas was this image - animation - and to her Pocahontas was beautiful, and so she thought I was Pocahontas.

Susan Blight:
Well I think in terms - in terms of not living in a state of rage all the time - I mean, there are, you know… Outside of my work at U of T I'm also an activist and an artist and I really - I put a lot of myself into fighting for justice and for decolonizing Canada, and all of those kinds of things. But beyond that I really do believe that what's kept us strong and what's kept us here, and what's kept us together is our ways. And those things never went

away, so I can only speak from the perspective of an Anishinaabe woman, but I will say that in terms of my community, you know, our ceremonies, including our Midewin ways, our sweat lodges, our shaking tents, all those kinds of things, were actually outlawed and illegal under the Indian Act. However our elders, they went underground with them and kept them alive.

So our language survived; our songs survived; our ceremonies survived. So for myself I am very connected to my community; I go home four times a year for ceremonies; I'm a member of the Midewin Society, which is the medicine society of the Anishinaabe people. I'm learning my language; I'm very connected to my family. So that, for me, is important; because for myself the colonial system or the colonial legacy of Canada is not the centre of my existence. Although it's affected me since the day I was born, it's not the centre of my existence. The centre of my existence is the Anishinaabe nation and the way that we look at things, and my family and my loved ones. So oftentimes, when I think about things like the residential school system I think to myself, at the height of what was happening and how horrific that was, how did we survive? How did the parents go on? How did the children go on? You know, I think about my nephew who is five years old, and I think, what if that happened now? What would I do? And how painful that would be, and, you know, how do you not just exist in a state of rage all the time? But I really believe that our indigenous ways kept us going and kept us centred and kept us good people, you know, with good hearts. So that - I mean, it's a very difficult question, but that's the only way that I know how to answer that.