

# “A NECESSARY ANTIDOTE”: GRAPHIC NOVELS, COMICS, AND INDIGENOUS WRITING

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In February 2014, prior to the XLVIII Super Bowl, the National Congress of American Indians created a 2-minute ad called “Proud to Be” as a response to the Washington football team’s unwillingness to change its offensive name of Washington Redskins. Dubbed “The Most Important Super Bowl Ad You Didn’t See” by Huffington Post journalist Ben Irwin, the ad “takes the seemingly complicated issue of Indian sports mascots and distills it with remarkable clarity” by “[highlighting] many aspects of Native American identity: Proud. Forgotten. Survivor. Mother. Father. Son. Daughter. Underserved. Struggling. Resilient. ‘Native Americans call themselves many things,’ the narrator concludes. ‘One thing they don’t call themselves, however, is Redskin’” (Irwin). Although the ad did not make the airwaves during the Super Bowl, it has since reached over 3 million views, bringing to the forefront questions of appropriateness, appropriation, and the continued predominance of racist stereotypes in many icons linked to popular culture and mainstream mass media. Some examples include Chicago *Blackhawks*, Cleveland *Indians*, Ottawa *Tomahawks*, and Edmonton *Eskimos*; there is an undeniable history of the use of inappropriate sporting mascots and names across North America.

“Comics, games, movies, and television,” states Michael Sheyahshe, author of *Native Americans in Comic Books*, “have always been a way to gauge how we, as a culture, are viewed by the dominant culture in America. Whether it’s the whooping, attacking horde of Indians in the early ‘cowboy’ movies, the notion of Native American as a crack-shot and/or expert tracker in comics, or the continued (mis) representation in video games [...] pop culture media serves to mirror the emotional consensus of how mainstream America sees us” (LaPensée). This ongoing issue, according to Sheyahshe, warrants the need for “Indigenous people [to] become more creatively involved in these various aspects of popular culture”; for popular culture

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is just as important to modern storytelling as are traditional art forms. Thus, this article explores how alternative, subversive forms of storytelling—such as the comic book and the graphic novel—are “a necessary antidote to the conventional history of the Americas” (Hill, back cover): these types of productions—or rather interventions—call for a necessary change in world-view, a reflection on the direct link to a past of colonialism, and the undeniable connection to a contemporaneity of imperialism. More specifically, I am interested in an analysis of how the graphic novel and/or comic book is fast becoming a genre of choice for a new generation of Indigenous writers. As Darren Préfontaine suggests, “the popularity of this format shows—as demonstrated by Chester Brown’s *Louis Riel*, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, and Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*—complex issues such as the life of Louis Riel, the Holocaust, or the Iranian Revolution can be told well in this medium. So well, that these graphic novels have become secondary school and university textbooks, and are now part of the popular culture canon” (Préfontaine v). Thus, through an examination of Gord Hill’s *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*, David Alexander Robertson’s *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*, and Richard Van Camp’s *Kiss Me Deadly*, this article considers the current value of popular culture in its ability to speak beyond linguistic, cultural, and intergenerational gaps, while bringing the mythical up-to-date with the contemporary within new spaces of diffusion and discussion.

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In his preface to *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book*, Gord Hill, a member of the Kwakwaka’wakw nation (Northwest Coast, British Columbia), writes that in order “to understand the world we live in today, it is vital to know our history. Unfortunately, the history we are taught through the educational system and corporate entertainment industry is false [...] The story of our ancestors’ resistance is minimized, at best, or erased entirely [...] The purpose of *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* is to raise the levels of historical understanding and warrior spirit among Indigenous peoples and others” (5-6). Author and activist Ward Churchill, in his introduction to Hill’s work, admits that at first, when asked to write it, he had “a considerable degree of skepticism” (7). However, he quickly realized how Hill’s work was not only complementary to his own, but confluent as well: “In the end,” writes Churchill, “it seems to me that our distinctly different stylistic approaches to conveying information tend to be mutually reinforcing, each in a certain sense completing the other to produce something more nearly resembling a whole, far stronger together than either could hope to be on its own” (7). Both Hill and Churchill thus agree upon the importance of making the legacy of their peoples’ resistance known, so that it may continue to inspire others to defend their territories and communities against colonial aggression. Churchill’s activist and academic commitment on issues involving assimilation, genocide, race, injustice, land struggles, and colonialism is certainly reflected with equal force, careful research, and defining accuracy in each of Hill’s illustrations: “Gord has perfected a method of combining graphic and written narrative that allows him to present a sweeping view of history, not only with impeccable accuracy, but very concisely and with extraordinary impact. This lends

his material an equally extraordinary accessibility, thereby making 'the Big Picture' available—yes, the pun *was* intended—to *anyone* willing and physically able to look at it" (20; emphasis in the original). Churchill adds that his "own approach to the same subject matter inherently precludes [his] work from attaining anything resembling the same reach. (On the other hand, [Hill's] method precludes the inclusion of considerable detail)" (20).

For Hill, the strength of the comic book is how it uses minimal text with graphic art to tell the story, making it more accessible not only for youth, but for those who may not want to, or cannot, read at length about the history of colonialism. A particularly interesting example of this is the different types of space—or number of pages—devoted to each of the 4 sections in Hill's comic book; namely, invasion, resistance, assimilation, and renewed resistance. The section "Assimilation" is only made up of two pages (61-62); however, the density and selective choice of the images—a priest reading the Bible to students; two photos of a student "before and after" (highly suggestive of those of Thomas Moore); two men watching what looks to be an "indian" TV show while drinking alcohol, their walls revealing a cacophony of contradictory symbols (the Canadian flag, a cross, and a traditional West Coast-like ornament of a whale); "before and after" images of ways of life (traditional and civilized); and, the climax, a man dressed in traditional attire, holding a treaty in one hand and the Canadian flag in the other while, in the background, there appears to be a chuckling government official—boldly denounce the numerous, destructive measures of assimilation, in such a way that the reader cannot avert his/her eyes from the facts.

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This deliberate brevity, however, in no way minimizes the devastating impact of the different colonial, assimilationist policies on the Indigenous Peoples of North America;<sup>1</sup> rather, it emphasizes the greater importance that should be remembered and granted to resistance and survivance, and to the persistence of the Warrior spirit, both before *and* after assimilation. This example underlines the importance of this different medium, and of the visual, as necessary tools towards raising awareness of colonial history and towards raising awareness of long-lasting resistance and efforts to ensure the continuity and transmission of traditions and storytelling for future generations.

While Hill's comic book focuses largely on the history of struggles—past and present—of Indigenous peoples across the world with settlers and colonizers, other First Nations authors and illustrators choose to focus on more Canadian, contemporary social- and health-related issues. The Healthy Aboriginal Network, a British Columbia incorporated non-profit society and publisher of both of Richard Van Camp's comic books, *Path of the Warrior* and *Kiss Me Deadly*, seeks to restore, reclaim, and more importantly, promote images of—to borrow from Akiwenzie-Damm—"healthy, whole, and loving people" (148), by facilitating the creation and distribution of—amongst others—comic books on health and social issues for Indigenous youth. The project of *Path of the Warrior*, for instance, was put together by Richard Van Camp with Sean Muir, the publisher of The Healthy Aboriginal Network, Cree artist Steve



Figure 1. Gord Hill, *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* (61-62).

A GOOD EXAMPLE OF ASSIMILATION IS THE ROMAN COLONIZATION OF WESTERN EUROPE. SOME REGIONS WERE OCCUPIED FOR AS LONG AS 500 YEARS...



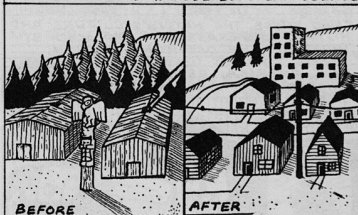
ALTHO' THE EUROPEAN TRIBES RESISTED, OVER TIME MOST HAD BECOME 'LATINIZED', WITH MANY LATER SERVING IN THE ROMAN ARMY OR GOVERNMENT...

TODAY, ENGLISH, FRENCH, SPANISH, GERMAN + ITALIAN HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN LATIN, THE RESULT OF ROMAN INVASION + CONQUEST...



WESTERN CIVILIZATION IS ITSELF THE RESULT OF ASSIMILATING EUROPEAN TRIBAL NATIONS INTO THE ROMAN EMPIRE...

IN N. AMERICA, RESERVATIONS WERE IMPORTANT TO REMOVE THE PEOPLE FROM THEIR LAND AND IMPOSE EUROPEAN CULTURE



SHELTER IS ONE EXAMPLE: INSTEAD OF MANY SHARING ONE SHELTER, NATIVES WERE FORCED TO LIVE IN EUROPEAN-STYLE HOUSES.

THRU LAWS SUCH AS THE INDIAN ACT, TRADITIONAL FORMS OF GOVERNMENT AND ORGANIZATION WERE BANNED...



IN PLACE OF THESE, BAND COUNCILS WERE IMPOSED, BASED ON EUROPEAN MODELS OF GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CONTROL...

THRU LOSS OF CULTURE + DESTRUCTION OF TERRITORY, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE BECOME DEPENDENT ON STATE FUNDING...



THIS MAKES THEM MORE EASILY CONTROLLED AND VULNERABLE TO BOTH GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATE PRESSURE FOR RESOURCES.

TO THIS END, STATES CONTINUE POLICIES OF LEGAL, POLITICAL + ECONOMIC ASSIMILATION OF NATIVE PEOPLES + RESERVE LAND...



THEIR GOAL IS TO DESTROY ALL INDIGENOUS CULTURE + IDENTITY THAT INSPIRES OUR SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE, AND WHICH LIMITS THEIR PLANS OF EXPLOITATION...



Sanderson, and the First Nations Health Council, to deal with physical fitness but also to address growing and alarming gang activity and violence across British Columbia; 20,000 copies of the comic were given out for free across BC. Van Camp's second initiative, for *Kiss Me Deadly*, a comic book on sexual health illustrated by Haida artist Chris Auchter, was pitched to the Government of the Northwest Territories—Van Camp is a member of the Dogrib (Tlicho) Nation from Fort Smith—who endorsed it immediately; 10,000 comics were distributed for free all over the NWT.

28 Set in a small community in the NWT, *Kiss Me Deadly* covers a range of difficult issues, from respect and communication in relationships, to pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, two-spirit people, and sexual health as a career or youth-led project. Chris Auchter's unique and expressive style of caricature drawings—exaggerated body movements, bug-eyed surprised expressions, and Clint's whipping off his shirt and singing “Eye of the Tiger” while doing push-ups—lend to *Kiss Me Deadly* a light, funny, and romantic approach to urban myths about the invasiveness of STI testing (“Are you going to put a swab up my pee hole?” asks Clint (18)), the difference between a pap smear and an STI screen, and the chances of pregnancy. There is also an interesting sub-plot being told—in a bid to combat homophobia and sexual health among same-sex couples—which involves a young gay man, Vern, going in for STD testing right after Mona and Clint. A conversation between the heterosexual couple about the concept of two-spiritedness and the traditional acceptance in their culture of same-sex relationships concludes with the comment: “Vern should be acknowledged in our community,” says Mona. “He deserves our love and respect—that’s what’s traditional” (31).

Darren Préfontaine, overseer of the project *Stories of Our People: A Métis Graphic Novel Anthology*, considers the graphic novel, which combines visual and print media, to be an ideal means to transmit stories and to reach youth and young adults. However, he writes, “the difficulty is to tell the stories without deviating from their original intent through the selective usage of pictures and words. In an Indigenous context, it is vital to show respect for the storytellers and stories themselves and not deviate from the original intent or appropriate voice” (Préfontaine v). In *Kiss Me Deadly*, Van Camp auspiciously mingles elements of the contemporary with the traditional: the narrative calls for the respect of Two-Spirit people, symbolized in the comic book both by a stoic, wise-looking man, wrapped in bear skin, and by the modern-day character Vern, whose presence opens and closes the story. In this way, the comic book successfully creates a new space of diffusion and discussion around same-sex relationships, in which the mythical and the traditional are brought into dialogue with the contemporary world.

In addition, the story reinscribes sexuality into a larger history, that of colonial Canada: “I want to learn how sexual health fits into the medicine wheel,” says Mona, “so we can start talking more about it” (29). Mona does not understand “why [we] talk about honouring ourselves through the physical, mental, emotional and the spiritual. But where does the sexual part fit in?” (46). If one were to answer Mona, the sexual

has been removed from the medicine wheel—through gender and colonial violence. With regard to a history of gendered discrimination and sexual policing—concepts written right into Canada's *Indian Act*—discussions around sexual health and practices have remained taboo in many Indigenous communities, as are the issues of sexual and horizontal violence. Although *Kiss Me Deadly* does not specifically address these concepts, a history of the absence in narrative of Indigenous sexuality is made clear. However, part of the uniqueness of *Kiss Me Deadly* resides in its being what Michael Sheyashe refers to as "Independent Voices from Smaller Publishers" (131); indeed, such comics are not only educational in their intent to reach Indigenous youth, they also reflect a specific creative freedom often associated to and affordable by smaller independent presses "to depict stories the way they want" (152).<sup>2</sup> In effect, Van Camp's comic book addresses the absence of sexual discourse by means of narrating actual relationships between his different characters—Mona and Clint, Vern and his boyfriend, and Dougie's grandparents—thus successfully rewriting sexuality into (at least) three very distinct generations.

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In a 2007 panel discussion, Steven Keewatin Sanderson—the illustrator for Richard Van Camp's other comic book, *Path of the Warrior*—said that "his main purpose was to present a character that an Indigenous youth might mentally conjure when hearing a traditional story; yet, the youth imagines the hero with feathers. Perhaps because of the influence of stereotypic imagery in popular media, even Indigenous kids (who may, at times, have more direct interaction with Native culture) might have their imagination tainted with the notion of obligatory feathers" (qtd. in Sheyashe 151). While such works may contain elements of stereotypic imagery—namely, in *Kiss Me Deadly*, a howling wolf-dog appears next to Mona and Clint as they embrace—what is emphasized is the importance of respect and transmission. "The comic does not take a patronizing tone toward Native people," explains Sheyashe, "and, most importantly, it illustrates the humanity of Native people complete with good and bad idiosyncrasies" (152). In addition, these particular "Indie" comics—written, illustrated and produced by Canadian Indigenous artists—each represent important elements of what being an Indigenous person in Canada represents and means, both past and present. In this sense, the work in itself is not the end goal; rather, it is a vehicle through which to educate others and a means to restore a voice to memory. The stories are explorations of different means to reconnect the elements of the past with those of the present and future. In this sense, the stories become complex artistic performances that emphasize the visual, adding to, and complementing, the textual, and enabling an exploration of different means to reconnect the elements of the past with those of the present and the future.

The works of Swampy Cree graphic novelist and writer David Alexander Robertson also seek to emphasize the importance of connectivity, transmission, and inheritance; most importantly, they seek to restore a sense of balance and belonging, not only between the individual's past and present, but also between the individual and his/her relationship with others, including the community. *7 Generations: A*

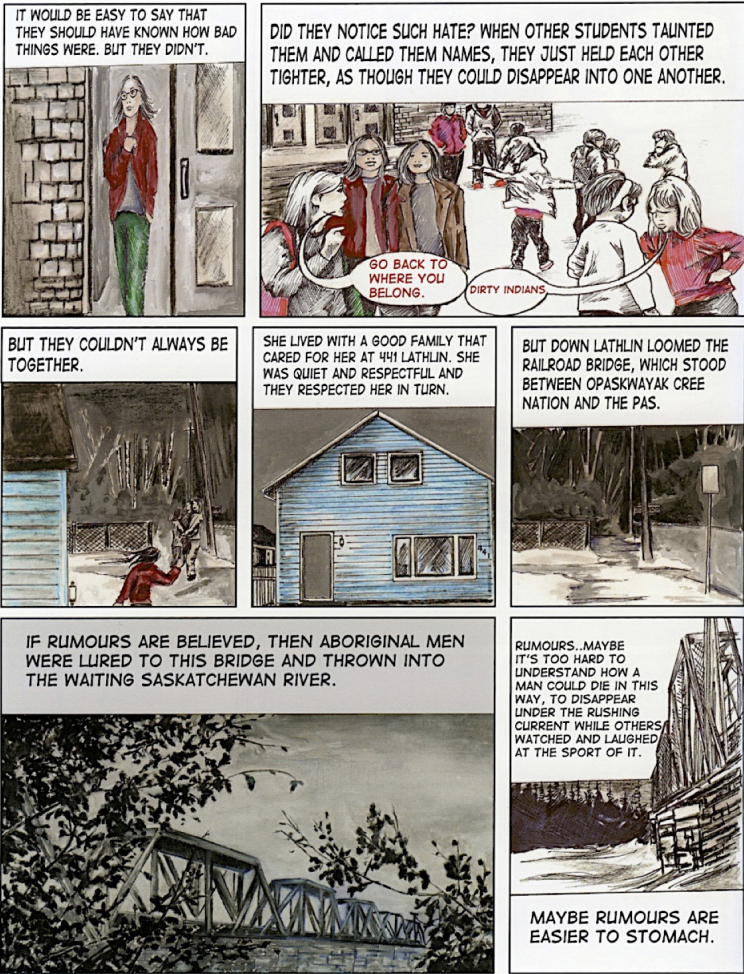
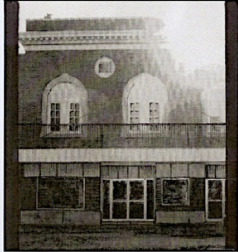
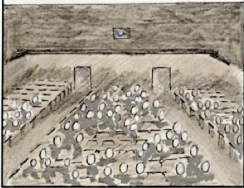
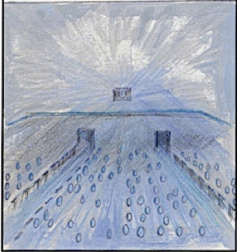
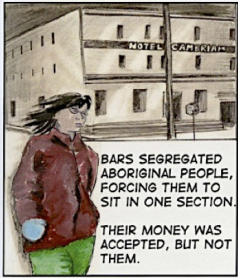






Figure 2. David Alexander Robertson, *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne* (16-17).



<p>DOWNTOWN THE PAS THE LIDO THEATRE</p> 	<p>ABORIGINAL PEOPLE WERE MADE TO SIT ON THE RIGHT SECTION OF THE THEATRE. THEY WERE NOT ALLOWED TO SIT ANYWHERE ELSE. IF THEY TRIED, THEY WERE ESCORTED BACK TO THE INDIAN SIDE.</p> 	<p>BUT IN THE STEEL GLOW OF THE MOVIE SCREEN...</p> 
 <p>BARS SEGREGATED ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, FORCING THEM TO SIT IN ONE SECTION. THEIR MONEY WAS ACCEPTED, BUT NOT THEM.</p>	<p>IT WAS COMMON FOR WHITE BOYS TO CRUISE AROUND LOOKING FOR ABORIGINAL GIRLS TO PARTY AND HAVE SEX WITH BECAUSE THEY WERE BELIEVED TO BE EASY.</p> 	<p>THIS WAS NOT IMPORTANT TO THE RCMP, THESE ACTS OF RACISM, SEXISM AND INDIFFERENCE.</p> 
	<p>THEY DIDN'T INVESTIGATE WHY SOME ABORIGINAL MEN HAD GONE MISSING. THEY DIDN'T NOTIFY THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WELL-BEING OF ABORIGINAL GIRLS.</p> <p><b>THEY DID NOTHING.</b></p> 	

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Figure 3. David Alexander Robertson, *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne* (6-7).

NOVEMBER 13, 1971  
APPROXIMATELY 2:30AM

HELEN BETTY HAD SPENT THE NIGHT WITH HER  
FRIENDS AND WAS ON HER WAY HOME.



HEY, THERE'S ONE  
RIGHT UP AHEAD...

PULL OVER AND  
CHECK IT OUT.



READY FOR SOME FUN, BOYS?



THEY THOUGHT BETTY WOULD BE  
EASY BECAUSE THEY BELIEVED  
ABORIGINAL WOMEN WERE EASY.



WUAKKA  
COME PARTY  
WITH US? WE  
GOT SOME  
WINE IN THE  
BACK!

THEY WERE WRONG.



NO.

WHAT'S  
THAT?  
YES? I  
THINK I  
HEARD A  
YES.

I SAID NO!





- Plains Cree Saga*—which opens with the main protagonist, Edwin, having attempted to commit suicide—explores the lives of four generations of men of the Blackbird family, as they face death, illness, residential schools, and abuse. The non-linearity of the narrative—for instance, the reader must wait until Book 3, *Ends/Begins*, to understand that the abuse and loss that Edwin’s father suffered at residential school explains his incapacity to connect and offer guidance to his own son, coupled with the visual parallelisms in which Edwin’s mother’s sorrow is mirrored by that of Bear’s mother—offers the reader a number of entry points, suggesting that there is no one way to end the story. To this effect, the collection ends with Edwin walking off to find “his own walk,” leaving his father behind; is he refusing to continue the cycle of violence and abuse? Or is it the beginning of a new cycle, as suggested by the giving up of the eagle-shaped amulet? Ultimately, the impacts of intergenerational trauma and memory are fleshed out through the use of specific visual effects: the ghost of the little brother is barely outlined in the far corner of the last panel, while the river, the landscape, “bleeds” beyond the borders of the page; as such, the evocativeness of the drawing lends to the story a deeper, endlessly deferred meaning, in need of further exploration.
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Similarly, David Alexander Robertson’s other graphic novel, *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*, not only retraces the steps of the young Cree woman from Norway House reserve before she is kidnapped and murdered; it also provides a glimpse into the values and perspectives prevalent in Canada in the early seventies—insults, segregation, beatings, kidnappings, and rape—that inevitably led to Helen Betty’s murder, and the lack of cooperation in pursuing justice.

The book carries a strong emphasis on the words “They did nothing” (Robertson 17), over and over again, which reflects the fact that “it was not until twenty years after her death that the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry came to the conclusion that the murder of Helen Betty Osborne had been fuelled by racism and sexism” (Adamson and Kopetsky 3). However, the story suggests that, to this day, there is still not enough being done to undo the prevalence of stereotypes. Indeed, the story opens—at the top of the page the words “Present Day”—with a young girl being bullied by two boys: “Dude, the squaw can’t keep her balance. She’s so drunk!!” (1). Lying in the snow, she holds out her hand to another boy, who had been walking behind them, and asks for help. He walks on, saying he’s “late for school already” (3). Evidently aware he has done something wrong, he attempts to justify his lack of action: “Not like it’s hard to get out of a snowbank [...] She could have gotten up herself. Besides, I’ve got lots of Aboriginal friends, as if I’m as bad as those jerks” (4). As he turns away from his locker to go to class, he sees the young girl in tears, but does not know what to say; the caption reads, “the silence is deafening” (4).

In class, the boy listens to his teacher tell them about a young girl named Helen Betty Osborne, “a 19-year-old Aboriginal woman who was brutally murdered over 35 years ago” (6). Another student, Mark—the same boy who insulted the girl at the beginning<sup>4</sup>—asks his teacher, “Why are we always learning about these Indians? I



mean, if this chick was white it wouldn't matter"; to which his teacher replies, "Mark, if this girl had been white she wouldn't have been murdered" (6). Learning about Helen Betty is not only about learning what happened to one girl: it is a call to learn about the hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women, Canada-wide; as such, Helen Betty Osborne "represents the truth of society's treatment of Aboriginal people" (6).

At this point, the two stories converge—the boy, Daniel, is seen walking home, lost in his thoughts, alongside the image of Helen Betty walking, but never reaching home—and an ultimate connectivity between the generations is represented. "Imagine walking home afraid because you look different," says the teacher. "Worse yet... imagine walking home feeling safe and never making it there" (6). In effect, the evocativeness of the drawing lends to the story a deeper, endlessly deferred meaning, in need of exploration, of unveiling, and of sharing. When he gets home, the young student discusses what he learned in class with his mother: "I feel like I was blind before, numb to people like Betty" (15). This new sense of awareness is reflected in his trying to make sense—however impossible—of past, irrecoverable events, including that of not helping his fellow student up from the snow bank earlier that day. His mother replies, "nobody can change the past; but we can learn from it [...] So maybe it happened for a reason" (15).

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David Alexander Robertson says of his graphic novel *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*, "The call of this story is to realize that one person can make a difference and, indeed, should feel personally responsible to contribute to the betterment of society [...] I ask you, upon closing the pages of this graphic novel, to contribute to the elimination of racism, sexism and indifference" (31). This reasserts Ward Churchill's realization that the graphic novel and the comic book can perhaps reach a considerably more important audience; they indeed succeed in making "'the Big Picture' available [...] to *anyone* willing and physically able to look at it" (20; emphasis in original). In the case of *The Life of Helen Betty Osborne*, the reader is made to realize that, Canada-wide, there is still an ongoing struggle for justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women who are still all too often victims of predatory violence. More importantly, the story draws attention to "those who did nothing"—bystanders, "those who knew the story and remained silent [but who now] must share their guilt" (30)—heavily suggesting that to remain a bystander is no longer an acceptable option; it is a call to action.

## CONCLUSION

Following the murder of Tina Fontaine, whose body was found in Winnipeg's Red River in August 2014, a similar call was answered: "Drag the Red," a group of volunteers took matters into their own hands—literally—by dragging the Red River and searching the banks. From 1971 to 2014, it seems that not much has changed; like

Helen Betty Osborne's death, Tina Fontaine's is in part due to the colonial legacy that has belittled Indigenous women since the installment of the Indian Act. But it is also due to the continuous misrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples—specifically women—in mainstream media and popular culture; and this, even within the very institutions that provide us “with tools to not only respond to such acts, but to change ideas and transform perspectives to ensure that such acts no longer take place” (Justice). In September 2013, both the University of British Columbia and the Université de Montréal campuses were the subject of disturbing frosh events: in the case of the latter, young men dressed up as “redfaces”—headdress and loincloths included; in the case of UBC, a Pocahontas chant. These two incidents, according to Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice,

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... speak to a profound lack of understanding about Indigenous peoples, as well as a seeming lack of empathy or context for why these matters might be offensive [... It also] indicate[s] a broader national problem, not one isolated to a single campus or region of the country [...] the use of the stereotyped Indian Princess version of Pocahontas as a frosh mascot demonstrates just how deeply sexism permeates anti-Aboriginal representations in popular culture, as such figures are routinely used to exoticize and eroticize colonialism through debasing Indigenous women's bodies [...]

What are students learning—or not learning—about Aboriginal peoples in the public school system that either blinds them to the racism of these acts or leads them to disregard the racism entirely? What are students not learning in their university courses? The frosh leaders were upper-year students, so they are already part of our education system, not just newcomers to it. This is a bigger conversation, but one that can start here, with us, right now. (Justice)<sup>5</sup>

How, then shall we go about to (re)create, hear and learn each other's stories anew? When Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* hit the stands, critics questioned at large whether the medium of the comic book was/is appropriate for conveying a Holocaust story. Similarly, one might ask, is the comic book, or the graphic novel, a suitable medium for conveying the tragedies of abused children in residential schools, teen suicide, and missing and murdered women? It most certainly is, because, firstly, through the use of images, the effect that words alone may convey is reinforced, rendering the story of the past as vivid and quasi-immediate as that of the present; facial expressions, landscapes, sound effects, captions, dialogue, points of view, sequences, body language and relationships all contribute to making the narrative more “real,” believable, perhaps, even, less fictitious; and secondly, images speak beyond linguistic, cultural, and generational gaps—an element that is becoming increasingly important given those gaps, caused by shame, lack of education and, more importantly, governmental assimilation policies. As such, comics will attract a wide audience: youth, adults, artists, teachers, and scholars, to name only a few. In this way, they enable a form of transdisciplinarity, for they touch upon the political, the social and the cultural; and, because of the importance given to the visual aspect, they are essential tools towards bridging linguistic and intergenerational gaps. These works partake in the creation of a new space to voice, create and resist, as well as to restore and reaf-

firm experiences, histories and memory, and to rectify the falsity of colonial imagery.

Obviously, conventional theories of cultural studies or popular culture require some "updating" in order to account for the historical and political specificities of Indigenous productions themselves. Nonetheless, in order to counter the tired, Indigenous stereotypes that plague popular culture, each and every medium must be (re)appropriated, "including newsletters, books, videos, music, posters, stickers, banners, and t-shirts—because no single one will be successful by itself" (Hill 6). Taken together, these contemporary works offer new ways of thinking about such interventions – the emergence of and capitalization on "upset" literary and visual devices as the products of a redefined, yet liminal existence—without them being constrained to or by fictitious frontiers—national, generic, linguistic or institutional.

## NOTES

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1. Although the focus of this article is Canada, and most of the events depicted in Gord Hill's *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* take place in Canada—and discuss numerous Canadian governmental policies—resistance and struggles in the US and in Mexico are dealt with as well, in terms of the similarities that the Indigenous peoples of North America have had to face with regard to colonialism, imperialism, and assimilation policies, emphasizing a common ground for resistance. This cross-border approach also points to the issue that borders are essentially imposed, colonial constructs, which many Indigenous peoples do not recognize.
2. Other themes explored in comics published by The Healthy Aboriginal Network include teen suicide, financial literacy, residential schools, education, diabetes, and respect for animals. Their newest project is a comic book on violence against women, aimed at youth aged 10-13.
3. Helen Betty Osborne died in November of 1971. "Betty was born in Norway House, a Cree community in northern Manitoba. In 1969, at the age of 17, she left her community to pursue her education, with the dream of becoming a teacher and helping her people. For two years, Betty attended the Guy Hill Residential School outside The Pas. Then in 1971 she moved into The Pas to attend high school" (Adamson & Kopetsky 3).
4. Madison Blackstone, the illustrator, uses specific color codes to distinguish her characters from each other: the boy (Mark) who bullies and insults the girl wears a red cap; the boy (Daniel) who did not help the girl up carries a green backpack.
5. Formal response from the First Nations Studies Program, University of British Columbia.

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