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The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book Foreword

Pamela Palmater

2021

Gord Hill's newly revised and expanded *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book* is our story—the story of Indigenous peoples' collective resistance to one of the bloodiest campaigns of violence, dispossession, and genocide the world has ever seen. It is the story of our collective lived experiences as Mi'kmaq, Kwakwaka'wakw, Kanien'kehá:ka, Navajo, Apache, Quechua, Maya, and other nations, who resisted the violent colonization of our lands and peoples over the last 500 years. Our Indigenous story—once hidden from public consciousness—bursts forth from the pages of this book with hundreds of stunning, graphic images of the invaders' unholy violence juxtaposed with the beauty of our peoples and the power of our resistance.

I am a L'nu woman and mother of two boys from the sovereign Mi'kmaw Nation on unceded Mi'kma'ki who has spent my life searching for the truth—the truth of my people. I never understood why the stories told to me by my large extended family and all our Indigenous relations were so different from what I was taught in school. I could not recon-

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cile in my mind what my family taught me about the grave injustices committed against Mi'kmaw peoples versus the public narrative about the peaceful settlement of Mi'kma'ki. How does a young Mi'kmaw woman understand the national myth of peace and friendship in the context of the scalping bounties placed on the heads of Mi'kmaw men, women, and children?

It was this persistent and nagging inconsistency and conflict in the narrative that made me obsessed with learning more. I worked and volunteered with different Indigenous community groups and organizations, while at the same time diving into the history books at university. I was struck by the inconsistencies between our stories and those told by white historians. The more I studied, the more questions I had. This led me to law school and then graduate work, hoping I could find the answers through independent research. While doing my graduate research in law, I worked for the federal government and found myself once again struck by the vast gulf between Indigenous lived realities and the powerful government machinery that is laser-focused on the assimilation of Indigenous peoples and denial of our rights.

All of the flowery political rhetoric about respectful relations with Indigenous peoples is government propaganda meant to distract the public from ongoing genocide against us. Our story has been effectively erased from the national consciousness of the states that now occupy Indigenous territories in North and South America. Gord Hill's *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book* tells this story from our perspective—the unvarnished, brutal truth that is the historic and ongoing genocide of our peoples and the destructive exploitation of our lands and waters. Hill manages to capture our stories of resistance in powerful artwork that cuts through the myth of benign intentions with vivid images of bloody colonization. The graphic artwork in this book will

will be able to see links between the high numbers of police shooting deaths and the growing incarceration rates of Indigenous peoples; the rising number of exploited, disappeared, and murdered Indigenous women and girls and the increasing numbers of Indigenous activists, advocates, land defenders, and water protectors on the ground in Canada and the US. We have never stopped our efforts to resist ongoing genocide and dispossession, and as we continue to re-educate the public, more and more Canadians stand with us in our demands for land back and an end to genocide.

This story is the great unknowing. It will help readers unlearn the misinformation they were taught in schools and mainstream media. It will help spark the revolution of knowledge and truth that will force history books to be rewritten. Indigenous peoples will see themselves represented as the warriors they are in mind, body, and spirit. They will see their stories freed from the sanitized versions that attempt to soften the message and minimize Indigenous lived realities. This book is the Indigenous truth of our power, survival, resistance, and resurgence, in full colour. It will be the story I share with my children and their children and every student I teach in the future. It will compel readers to join us in our resistance. Once you read this book, you can never unknow the truth.

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leave readers questioning everything they have been taught about the “settlement” of Indigenous America.

There is literally no other book like this one on the market. Hill takes us through a one-of-a-kind journey of Indigenous America from contact to present day in a way that no other book has done. This is not an academic book of any sort. Readers will not find lengthy passages citing numerous scholars with hundreds of citations. Instead, Hill uses narration and art to unravel the myths, fallacies, and outright lies that form the basis of state propaganda and public miseducation about Indigenous peoples and the so-called settlement of the Americas. His gripping artwork compels readers to see the story, to feel the story. Not only is this book visually stunning, it will challenge readers to lift the blinders and question the propaganda they have been fed by educators, politicians, and the media.

Indigenous peoples will experience the journey through this book in a different way. We will see ourselves and our experiences represented in the cultural beauty that is our brown skin and painted faces, all set within the familiar context of our extended families, cultures, traditions, and practices. We will see our stories through the eyes of our men, women, children, and elders, as well as our relationships with and interconnectedness to the lands, waters, and all living things. Hill's artwork sets our stories against a backdrop of colourful green landscapes, white-capped waves, and blue skies that merges our peoples and the living ecosystems into one. This beauty of our lands and peoples is contrasted with the violence of the invaders and their bloodthirsty quest for riches.

My own personal journey through this book was a mix of emotions—from the love I felt for our peoples and the sadness for the millions of lives lost, to the righteous anger I felt over the inhumanity of the genocide and the pride in our collective Indigenous resistance. It is a book I will never forget. For so many years, I tried to find the answers that would reconcile

these conflicting narratives. As a lawyer and a professor, I had unconsciously hoped to find the missing link between our stories and theirs—the elusive “both sides” to the story. I was a voracious reader and researcher, but still, the answers seemed just out of reach. However, as a lifelong Indigenous activist and advocate, I knew that our lived experiences were not what was presented by politicians, educators, courts, or the media. My work on the ground and in communities showed me that this was where the real stories were, and they needed to be shared with the world.

An elder once told me there can never be two sides to a story; there is only the story and how it has been manipulated, changed, or erased by those with a vested interest in covering up the truth. Her powerful words have stayed with me all these years. One of the strengths of Hill’s comic book is that he tells the uncensored truth of our stories in the same way we hear it in our communities. The story of our collective resistance is the story. It is the story that unravels the colonial tales that were meant to make us feel inferior. Hill’s book shows us that we were not weak—we were powerful, formidable forces willing to defend our lands and our peoples with our lives. We were not sickly—we were so strong, healthy, and free from disease that we astounded the invaders. We were not lazy—we were steadfast in the protection of our peoples. And despite 500 years of genocide and the immeasurable toll it has taken on our minds, bodies, and spirits, we continue to resist. In the words of Mi’kmaq scholar Daniel Paul, we were not the savages—they were.

The book starts out by debunking the popular myth that we were just recent immigrants to the Americas and explains how we have occupied our lands for tens of thousands of years. This sets the context for the stories that follow, each of them tied to the territories that we governed, protected, and defended. Land is literally at the heart of the colonial objective, and Hill sets this out as the core theme of the book. Colonial Indian policy

was similar throughout the Americas: (1) acquire Indigenous lands and resources and control lucrative trade routes, and (2) get rid of the Indian problem through either elimination or assimilation. Throughout the book, you see how Indian policy played out through horrendous acts of violence, torture, murder, and genocide, from first contact to present day.

Therein lies the uncomfortable truth of this book: that the genocide continues into the present day. From the Spanish conquests and massacres of the Aztec, Inca, and Maya empires; the Pueblo revolt and the Battle of Wounded Knee in what is now known as the United States; and the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico to the Canadian army laying siege against Mohawks at Kanehsatà:ke; the RCMP attack on Secwépemc at Ts’peten; and the RCMP forced removal of Wet’suwet’en peoples from their Yintah—the stories presented in Hill’s newly revised and expanded edition take us on a journey through the violent dispossession, oppression, and genocide happening right now.

Hill’s work is well known amongst Indigenous activists and scholars all over North America. His unique artistic style is a combination of Indigenous culture and political commentary that is grounded in resistance. The first edition of this comic book, together with *The Anti-Capitalist Resistance Comic Book* and *The Antifa Comic Book*, share common themes of resistance and resurgence against unjust, oppressive governments, laws, and systems that perpetuate violence and suffering amongst marginalized peoples. Anyone who studies Indigenous resistance and resurgence will be familiar with Hill’s work and will welcome the updated and expanded edition. Plain language and detailed illustrations make this work accessible to large audiences, including youth, high school students, university students, and people of all backgrounds. It will also speak to other racialized peoples who have suffered at the hands of colonizing invaders who engaged in widespread violence, genocide, slavery, and empire building in other place such as Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, and the African continent. Readers