

The Henceforward Episode 11

Podcards from the Edge

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Eve: Aang aang. This is Eve Tuck, and this is The Henceforward, a podcast on settler colonialism and anti-blackness on Turtle Island. Here we seek to build mutually respectful conversations about Indigenous and Black life in settler societies through attempting to talk, text, transit and land.

Sefanit: In this snack episode, we hear Rahma, Christy and Fizza deliver podcards that reflect on time and place. Spoken as short letters, the contributors take us to Black Creek, an Art History Museum, and on a commute along Highway 407 to consider the often untold stories of land and spaces we engage with daily.

Rahma: Hello. It's me, Rahma. I'm speaking to you from Black Creek. I'm standing on the overpass, and I could see the roofs of Black Creek Pioneer Village. I haven't been there in a while since I was a child at Shoreham Public School, and I see the kids walk there sometimes, to the Pioneer Village. I used to love that place. It was like stepping into the past, and what child doesn't dream of that?

Mostly everything in the village dates back to 1840 to 1860, except the Stong family houses that were built around 1816 to 1832. The Stong family were the first pioneer settlers on the land, and they were given land grants by the governments on the condition that they cultivate the land. The Stong family is well-known around here. There are streets named after them, and York University has a college named after them as well.

I often wondered about before that. Before the settlers, what was here? It's shockingly hard to find information, and Pioneer Village certainly did not teach me. What was taught was how aboriginal peoples helped early settlers, and I quote, "by teaching them herbs for medicine and new sources of food."

So I did some of my own research, and there are mentions of Ojibwa settlements ranging from 800 to 2,000 people, and artifacts have been found as well. However, their largest settlements have been literally buried under shopping center on Jane and Wilson. Black Creek Pioneer Village erases and sanitizes the history of our area, but also makes you feel disconnected from a legacy of white settlers.

The museum clings to the colonial past of the land while distancing itself from the realities of Jane and Finch, the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in Toronto that faces many challenges of poverty, unemployment and violence. That simple idyllic past it portrays is very different from its surroundings. I think I'll always view Pioneer Village with a sense of nostalgia. In the future I would hope it would be more accessible to its neighbors.

Christy: Symmetrical 5-bay facade and central pediment reflect the conservative influence of the 18th century British classical tradition.

[Layered audio reading two quotes]

“We are the ones who articulate where we came from, where we are now, and where we are going” – Rebecca Belmore

“Eleven out of 25 of the founding fathers were slaveowners” – Camille Turner as Miss Canadiana

We are the ones who articulate where we came from, where we are now and where we are going.

Dear Art History, I’m a former student of yours, writing to you from the Art Gallery of Ontario and The Grange, the 19th century manor house that forms part of the museum building. This is a site that speaks loudly about certain histories, white European histories, but it is also an area where recent performances by Black and Anishinaabe artists assert alternative histories and futurities.

I’m sending this podcard to you, Art History, because I was thinking about your silence on “the combination of architecture with governmentality,” as Jodi Byrd puts it. Here’s what I’m sending to you. The first sound, the sound of the place is ambient noise from the gallery and my footsteps on the gravel walk outside The Grange. The ambient noise also continues below the next two sounds. In the second sound, my presence is represented in my voice, reading text from the historical plaque outside The Grange. You can also hear my footsteps.

The final sounds are my voice quoting two artists who have done site-specific performance work in The Grange area; Camille Turner whose work here focused on revealing the erasure of local Black histories, and Rebecca Belmore whose work asserted the presence of First Nations lives in histories in this place. These sounds are layered because I was thinking about multiple histories, cacophony or haksuba, as Jodi Byrd asks us to imagine.

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I know how much you like your master narratives, Art History, but maybe it’s time to rethink your liberal humanist ways. I think we both have lots to catch up on. From, Christy.

Fizza: Dear Privileged Commuter, today I understood. As I cruised from one end of the city to the other, during the peak of morning rush hour, at full speed, without ever having to slow for emerging on-ramps or crawl through intermittent volume; I understood.

I hear a lot about the 407, about its rapid expansion, about its outrageous tolls, but mostly about its ease of travel, travel that is apparently worth every penny as it safeguards your time and your sanity. Today as I ventured onto the 407 and cruised from the west end of the city to the east, in under 30 minutes, I understood. But was it worth the cost?

Beyond the exorbitant \$42 I paid in tolls, I've recalled the numerous voices and quashed protests of years past, those who tried to stop this highway, communities whose lands were appropriated by the broken promises of governments, so-called protected green space that was auctioned off to developers, a massive public infrastructure project now left to the hands of private interests.

The 407 continues to expand with impunity, and we marvel at the smooth, unimpeded drive. Signed, Privileged Commuter.

Sefanit: This mini episode hopes that you, the listeners, will further think about where you are situated, what was erased there, what is being erased there, what was replaced, what has been forgotten, what has been made to be remembered and how this is convenient to our day today.

Eve: The Henceforward, Indigenous and Black life on Turtle Island.

[0:09:16] End of Audio