

Deirdre McCorkindale – Audio Transcript

(Interviewer) So, I'm gonna just sort of guide us towards this question. Um, how were you taught about the Underground Railroad? Um, or, early settlement around the 1790s, 1850s in school?

(Deirdre) Uh okay, so this is gonna sound very strange because I grew up in Chatham, but in school, I was not taught. Um, which is now that I, you know, now that I'm older, which is kind of hilarious because I grew up in one of the most important terminus in the Underground Railroad. Not just, people just think about it as a place where people settled here. It's not just that. This place was this huge hot bed of abolitionism. Like, Frederick Douglas came here. John Brown came here. Martin Delany lived here. And I never got... I never got taught about any of it. Um, we didn't visit- We have three sites here, uh, that teach the history, and I never, um, in school, I never, I never got taught about that. We didn't go to the sites. I know it depends on which school you went to because I think, my partner is also from Chatham. His school did go out to the Josiah Henson Museum, formerly Uncle Tom's Cabin. Thank god they changed that name.

(Interviewer) Yeah, I know.

(Deirdre) Um, they went out there, but you know, that was kind of the extent of it. The closest thing I ever remember is, I had a teacher- which is kind of funny because I kind of written on his books since then. And the teachers still teaching this book. I had a teacher who read a book to us called "Underground Canada" and she just read it to us, like it wasn't part of the lesson plan. She just read it to us. Um, she had like a, like she spent, like an hour of our time like reading to us every day.

(Interviewer) Okay.

(Deirdre) And she chose, she chose that particular book. And in a way, I'm happy that she did because that was the closest thing I got to Black History, but that particular book, they still, every Black History Month, use that book. And, I got nothing against the book. It came out in the 70s. It's not a bad children's book about the Underground Railroad, but it's not about Canada.

(Interviewer) Mhm.

(Deirdre) And, I, I never got taught any of it. Now, I did get taught some things, but I got some thing, taught some things because of people outside in the community teaching me things. But in school? Nothing.

(Interviewer) Did they really? So, the first instance was through that book and then just through families and friends?

(Deirdre) Yeah, like, I learned about things, like, through my grandparents and like people in the community and things like that, but like at school? You, if you grew up in Chatham which is really funny because I went to school with like a bunch of like black and mixed raced kids, um, who were- who have like family roots in this area, but like if

you grew up in Chatham, a lot of times, like you would never know that, like, black people lived here.

(Interviewer) That's so interesting.

(Deirdre) Yeah.

(Interviewer) So that, that sort of leads me into my next question, um, about how maybe you would now, currently, prefer to learn about Black Canadian histories. Like for example, through Heritage Minutes, through micro series blockbuster exhibitions, um, podcasts, books.

(Deirdre) Um, so you're talking about, like, for the general public?

(Interviewer) The general public, for yourself, um, and maybe tie that into, uh, the Underground Railroad.

(Deirdre) Um, so the first thing, I will say, regarding the Underground Railroad is that Canada needs an overhaul of how we talk about it. I teach at the university level. I teach a Black-Canadian history course. Um, and when it came time- So, I start right at 1625 and we go to about the 1980s because then we got half a semester, right? But, I start there and I, I had, I've had like a few black students who take the course. Unfortunately, a lot of Black students don't take history. And I understand why. I, I truly do, I understand why.

(Interviewer) Maybe you could elaborate?

(Deirdre) They don't see themselves in the history. History is a very White dominated space. They don't see themselves and they don't see it of value and of use and I understand. And it's not a comfortable space for them to be in. But, when I did this course at Guelph, um, we did have some Black students. And, when we got to the Underground Railroad- because I had to talk about the Underground Railroad. You're talking about like 30,000 Black people coming to Canada, roughly. Estimate. That's the estimate we have right now, right? I have to talk about that. And I knew, like, and I knew this was gonna happen and I saw it in their faces. As soon as I got to that topic, all of them, they kind of, rolled their eyes, and they, because they were frustrated and they were tired because they haven't been taught about the Underground Railroad properly. What they have been taught about the Underground Railroad is that your people were enslaved. They came up here and everything was wonderful and that you should be grateful. And that's all they're ever taught about it. They're not taught, they were never taught, so we started with, you know, how people got here. And then I talked about the settlement, and then I talked about activism. They were never taught that Black people ran that Railroad. They weren't taught that they were the ones who did the routes, they were the ones who did all those things. And like yeah White folks helped out and everything. I'm not saying that they didn't. But they get told this story of like very nice White Quakers who like, opened up their root cellars to these poor ignorant masses. And, that's not what it was. And, I, I was able to sort of slowly change their mind, but,

but I understand their frustration. And, in order to kind of talk about Black history in Canada we have to overhaul a lot of things.

(Deirdre) The Underground Railroad is very much so- As much as Black people get erased from Canadian history, the Underground Railroad is very much so a part of Canadian identity. Um, it's, it's the thing that Canada holds up to act superior to other countries in the world and it shouldn't. And, we have to- first that has to be fixed. And that doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about the Underground Railroad because there's some people who want to kind of throw it out. We shouldn't because, it's an amazing, it's an amazing story. But, we have to overhaul that.

(Deirdre) And in terms of like resources, I think anything and everything is, is good because people have different learning styles. People have different ways that they consume. Like, I, it took me a long time to learn this about myself, I'm a very audio-based person. I like to, I really like lectures, I like podcasts, I like, I like to listen to people; whereas, other people might respond better to exhibits, with pictures and things like that. So, I think anything and everything. I don't think that there's a "one-size fits all" approach to this. Um, there's lots of different things like interactive exhibits. Um, my class put together like a web book, we haven't published it yet, but we've been putting together a web book about "Emancipation Day" and they each kind of approached it from different, different angles like where they would- Some were like really into some of the pictures that they could find about things when they could find things, and some of them were really into like newspaper articles and like how they, how they researched and what they wanted to display as different. So, in terms of how to get the information out there, I think it needs to be everything and anything. It can't just be, um, I'm in the academic space but I'm very much so, every time somebody, like for this, any time somebody like for a local thing, to my own detriment, I will almost always do it, unless I'm doing something else at the time. Um, because as much as I love doing academic university things, that's not always accessible to people and I really hate that sometimes some of the work that we do is behind a paywall. So, it can't just be me at the university level, like it bothers me that some of my students... My students are like, you know, 19, 20, 20 to 23 maybe out of like the older scale. And my class was the first time that they ever found out that we had slavery in Canada. You know, like they shouldn't be that old.

(Interviewer) Yeah, no.

(Deirdre) You know? So, you know. It needs to be that- I'm sorry, that was sort of like a ramble. Does that answer your question?

(Interviewer) It certainly does. Yeah, the, I really do understand that concept of academia has been kind of like a gatekeeper for certain accessibility and also, just on that point, it's a little bit about the language that people use in academia. It is inaccessible, you know. And that's something, I think partially the university's job is to think how can we translate this information in a consumable manner. And I think that's

amazing. The concept of just you, you know, spreading it out because people do learn differently.

(Interviewer) I mean myself I am a visual learner

(Deidre) yeah my partner is a visual learner as well yeah

(Interviewer) yeah I love a documentary. *pause* yeah that's great thanks, that answer was incredible. So, just speaking about the stories like, uh, the Underground Railroad, um, I'm assuming you've heard of the "Coloured Corps", the Black militia. Um, so, what do you think about how this event is shared, uh, in Canadian history through these resources or in general?

(Deidre) I think, again, now I'm not an expert on the "Coloured Corps", um, but I do teach on it, because they're kind of part way between my Loyalist discussion and the later settlement that happens, um, in the 1800s. And, the issue I find with it is, it has a similar issue to the Underground Railroad discussion where either that story is not talked about at all, or it is used as a way to, um, kind of romanticize Canadian history because you know they'll say like, "Oh we have this 'Coloured Corps'" and it's like, well we need to talk about the fact that Richard Point had tried with other men to form their own corps when they had military experience through the, uh, the American Revolutionary war and that they rejected. And only after a hugely unqualified White person, um, came in and it was only when they needed them. That story of the Coloured Corps, it, we freeze it in the particular time, but, it's part of a larger story of Black military service throughout North American history. I mean, their story is so similar to so many stories where Black men especially want to, they want to serve their country in some way we kind of had this discussion about the military. But, they want to serve their country. They're rejected, and then when the chips are down and they're desperate, they take them but they still don't accept them fully. And there's a through line through that and I think it's part of that larger history, but instead we just kind of glorify like, "Oh, this was the first Black military", we kind of have this obsession with "Oh this is the first Black person to do this", "This was the first Black person to do that". We freeze them, we don't talk about kind of the larger history which is far more interesting. And we don't talk about what they did after. We just talk about their military service.

(Interviewer) It's sort of this, uh, this tangible uh experience, where you know, we have people, Black men were, uh, they're in the military and they had their space, yet they were still segregated, you know. So. they were given this opportunity, but at the same time, they were not. And that's sort of a, it's sort of a physical example of a metaphor that rides through all of Black history.

(Deidre) So, it's an amazing story and I'm that it's starting to get a bit of a spotlight, but what I see happening is similar things happening to the Underground Railroad: is this kind of glorification and not truly talking about- Now, I understand. Like, and trust me. I do Black history and I understand sometimes the records are sparse. We don't always

know everything. But we focus so much on, like, we freeze- We do this especially with Black history, but Black history in general has this problem. We freeze particular people at points in time, um, but they're more than that. We freeze Richard Pierpoint at that point and I'm using him as an example because we have more records on him, right? You know, we freeze Frederick Douglas at a particular point in time. (Incomprehensible) We freeze them, but they went on and did so many other things. Typically, when I hear people talking about Richard Pierpoint, we don't talk about like his struggles to go home. Like, because, like the time that he petitioned, the government said like "Listen, I don't want this land" – which was crappy anyway – "I don't want this land, can I please in lieu of this?" I just want to go home. I just want to go back to Africa. That's usually what I see for like public- And like yeah, academics talks about that, but when I see public events about Richard Pierpoint and the Coloured Corps, I don't see that, I don't see displays about how they struggled, about how they didn't get the land that they were promised. But instead it's like "Oh, they were really patriotic" and you know they built all of these things and freeze them at that point in time. And there's more to their stories than that and that's my impression of that particular story. It's going down the same road I see other Black histories going down.

(Interviewer) And I think, a good way to, perhaps, unfreeze or thaw these stories is to connect them to contemporary voices or, uh, ancestors, or descendants. Um, I'm curious: Do you have any connection to stories, Black histories that you think are important?

(Deirdre) Um, so, I feel like I have a lot of connections to Black histories, but whether or not the public deems those important but I think that they are. Um, if you're asking if I have anybody famous in my family, I guess, not really. But, um, I think that's what makes them remarkable. My family is (incomprehensible) and very proud of this. My family, both my grandparents, they're part of this group of Black people who to Canada at different times. They're originally from the South. Um, my grandfather's people are from Virginia. My grandmother's people are from Delaware but I think they were from another place in the south before that. The record is kind of sparse. They came to Canada and they have been a part of the Chatham (incomprehensible) communities for a very long time. Um, our people have been here, um, it's funny when you think about Chatham people. It's really funny because I'm a Brown person, so people in Canada are constantly asking me where I'm from. It's funny because, you know, my people have been here longer than most of the White people in Canada, and um they're part of that history. And they brought piece from the south and pieces of America with them. You can see it in their cooking. My great-grandmother, and most people wouldn't necessarily be proud of it, but I am, so my great-grandmother was part of that long tradition of Black women being and I'm really proud of her. And like, yeah, she didn't go on and write some famous book about this that and the next thing, but she was a part of the community and she was a domestic and she kept her family going. My great-grandfather was, my great-grandfather was, he served in the First World War so he is one of the Black Canadian veterans. So, I'm part of that. And they've just been, I don't

know, they've just been a part of this community. And like so, and I can't give you a like, "Well this famous abolitionist is my great-great-great-grandfather" and I'm sure some of the other people- Well you're talking to my grandmother. I'm sure she'll find a famous person. But as far as I know, I don't know any famous person. I'm just proud of what they are!

(Interviewer) I think that's an important point. It's not that... What makes them famous is like the history books, right? And I'm covering these stories, I'm like rewriting these history books. And that's what I think this conversation is about. It's about, like you said or what I referred to, I'm unfreezing, you know.

(Deirdre) Um wait, they were all a part of this community. My grandfather's people are part of the (incomprehensible) and Black community you know. And my, one of my grandmother's relatives, the pool is named after them, they were a part of it. One thing I'm proud of my grandparents is that they stayed in this community even though it's been dwindling a little bit, it really mattered to them. Like my great uncle, he was a boxer he. My uncle Eddie went on to be- I do have a famous person! He went on to be one of the first Black hockey coaches in North America. He played hockey here in this park, in this community. So, I guess those are my connections.

(Interviewer) That's really, really, amazing. Thanks for sharing. Um, I think now, I'd like to shift a bit towards museums. What do you think about the current practices of museums featuring these histories or underrepresented histories in general?

(Deirdre) Um, I think it's a good thing. Um, my only concern sometimes is, this museum here, this was built by the community. The story of this, to a certain extent is that Gwen Robinson, I can't remember which one of her sons it was, but her son had to do a project and he couldn't find any information and that's kind of how a lot of this began. Similar with the Luxton (sp.?) Museum, how it was community curated. But, my concerns with museums including the Black history is that sometimes they do this and they don't always have community input, and sometimes they're just like "Here's a Black person!" you know, and it doesn't have a lot of context and they don't know how to present it. And sometimes, there's, you know there's a little bit of segregation in Canada, and like, people don't always think to like ask the community. And the one thing I definitely learned over the years of doing my research on different things, like you gotta talk to the people about how they do things. And like, yeah I do, and to a certain extent, half of them will give you certain answers depending on who you talk to, right? But, having community input because there is a, there's a tendency. Academics does this, White museums does this too. They come down to our spaces, take what they need, and we never see you again. And they don't give back to the communities that they have taken from. And this is a problem with Indigenous histories as well. "Oh, we'll take your beadwork. We'll display it here and we'll take this." But we won't have partnerships, and we won't promote your museums in your spaces, and things like that. So, on the one hand, I think it's good because I don't want a segregation of the history ever because Black history is Canadian history. Like I've had, I have a lot of White

students who take history, and I've had a bunch of them saying like, "Oh I haven't thought about taking Black history and then I took your course and I really liked it, and I haven't thought about it because I'm White and I don't know what my place is in it". So then I say, "Hey, this is your history too!" You think that you exist outside of this? You're very much so a part of this. Do you know what one of the greatest White privileges is? When you're done having this conversation with me, you can go home and you never have to think about this conversation again if you don't want to, right? But you should, and it's a part of your history. So, I want the Black history in those spaces. I think it's important and I'm glad that, I'm kind of waiting for the shoe to drop about it because like every few years there's like a big (incomprehensible) like "Oh, we need more Black history!" and everything like that and then there'll be like one display or they'll hire one person or something like that and everybody will look and say "well, we've done enough. You should be grateful. We've done enough for you." And then we have to wait until the next cycle, right? But, I do think it's a good thing. I just, it's one of those like proceed with caution kind of things.

(Interviewer) Well, yeah I mean I do realize my positionality and the state of this conversation right now. I think I kind of want to give you some space now on if you have any thoughts on how this conversation can be presented in an exhibition.

(Incomprehensible)

(Deirdre) So, like I think text, audio- Audio and video are really helpful because... It's funny, I was- Part of the reason I'm home right now is because a friend of mine, she just published a book on the "Coloured All-Stars" and she asked me if I could- She asked me if I could moderate the panel discussion. And, one of the things that she talked about- She's a White researcher. One of the things that she talked about was, um, she was able to... Somebody from I think the Sports Hall of Fame was able to give her a tape of, I think it was Boomer Harding – he has since passed along, he's been gone for quite some time – um, she was able to get a tape. And I think it was somebody interviewing him in like the 70s or something like that. And she said, like something about hearing his voice talking about his time playing baseball and like listening to him, she said, it just, it gave her more than like, you know, looking at like sports writers were (incomprehensible). It gave her more. And obviously we can't do that with people from like the 1800s and things like that, but I think there's something to be said for multiple... Kind of multi-media things like having your visuals, also having your audio, having people speak and also for some of the White museums- What you're doing right now is exactly what you should be doing. You're not just, you know, taking Osborne Anderson's story and showing a poster of him, you're talking to people who are from where Osborne Anderson worked, right? And you're talking to kind of community members and you're asking what it means. The other thing that you can do is, to a certain extent, cite your sources. This is where we got it from. Partner with the, partner with these Black communities. Try and lift them up because a lot of time, we're underfunded. Especially in comparison to some of the White museums, we're just underfunded and people don't

always- White museums, especially bigger White museums can promote us, can kind of turn grants our way and say “This is where we got our information from”, and have kind of those sections, like have our pamphlets, have our things, um, alongside the newspaper article that you’re displaying or whatever you’re displaying. I think it can, it can really help because it makes us less segregated. It makes us more, um, community-based because sometimes I think our problem is, again, it’s a segregation issue. You know, this museum’s over here, and this museum’s over here. And we should be having networks with each other and I think that’s a way where you can help with these things.

(Incomprehensible)

(Interviewer) So, is there something about Black history, like an event, a tradition, a story that you would like to see the next generation learn that perhaps isn’t presented these days?

(Deirdre) Oh gosh, there’s so many things. Um, the project that I’m working on right now with a friend of mine and I hope to maybe kind of do more of in the future is for- I’m gonna keep my comments to Chatham because it’s what I researched but one thing that I want to talk more, I mean we talk about this a lot in the museum, but what so many people don’t know is the amount of activism in this community. We’re doing a project where we’re trying to track like all of these books and slave narratives and things like that that either have a connection to Chatham, or somebody lived in Chatham, um, the speeches that were made here, all of those things. Um, that’s a thing I would like people to know. I know, um, one person who gets left out a lot of times when we’re talking about the 1800s when we’re talking about Black history in general is Martin Delany. And Martin Delany was born free, he was a doctor. He was a Black doctor. And he was one of, I think he was one of nine who got accepted to Harvard medical school. Now, they didn’t let him in because the students complained. They didn’t want Black people at the school, and because of that he became, he still became a doctor. Um, because at that time, at that time, medical school, you didn’t necessarily have to go to medical school. You could do an apprenticeship and stuff. Medical schools really only have been only a relatively legitimate thing for a relatively recent amount of time. So, if it makes it sound like he was unqualified it’s not he wasn’t. But, he went on and became one of the most important minds in Black North American thought. He was the godfather of Black nationalism. Before Marcus Garvey, before those people in the 20th century talking about those things, Martin Delaney was talking about it. He was talking about women’s rights, he was talking about all of those things. He served in the... He’s one of those people who makes you look at your life and wonder what you’re doing with the amount of stuff that they did. He served in the military, met with Lincoln. Part of the reason that he convinced Lincoln to allow Black people into the military during the Civil War. And he lived here! His kids were baptized down this street! You know? Well some of them, he has older kids too, but... But like he lived here, and he lived in Canada. And I want people, I really want people to know that because so much of these stories of Black

people in Canada is about is, is just about “Well, they came here”. It’s just about how they came here. I want it to talk about what they did do when they came here. We don’t talk about Black intellectual circles and like the things that they produced. And I think the other thing that needs an overhaul that we need to talk more about is, we need to talk more about the 20th century. We only talk about Black people usually in, about the 19th century. There’s been excellent work being done about Canadian slavery- I’m very happy about that. Um, and I hope that, you know, several of the people that I know who are doing that work- keep going. But, we need more work on the 20th century, because it seems like, sometimes that if you do get taught about Black history in Canada, you get usually taught about the 1800s. Something something, especially if you think about it if you’re a Black kid, right? If you get, maybe if you get taught about the Underground Railroad or you get taught, alright 1850. Something, something, something, something. Now you’re here. And all of that time in between that we don’t talk about like the civil rights movements that happened in Canada. We don’t talk about Black power movement in Montreal. We don’t talk about like the Chatham Kent area. Part of the reason that you and I can sit in whatever restaurant we want now and have access to (incomprehensible). You know things aren’t perfect. Part of the reason we have that is because of a group of Black people from Dresden, Chatham, and Buxton trying to fight against segregation. And you know, they would go to the province because they made the Equal Employment Act in 1951 and Hugh Burnett and the National Unity Association went to the Premier and said “No, this isn’t enough. This isn’t covering everything.” And part of the reason we have fair accommodations, this was before the Charter of Rights and Freedom and things like that, we have that because of Black people. The amount of buildings and infrastructure in Canada, roads, buildings, especially like battlements built by Black people. So, there’s a lot of things that I would like to see! Martin Delany and I think just the 20th century in general are like my short answer for you.

(Interviewer) Yeah, that’s really important. Maybe there’s a sentiment in there that you can draw out for children if you’re speaking to a kid who’s 11 years old, um, anywhere in Canada. Maybe there’s something that they could use moving forward in their day-to-day life when it comes to Black history.

(Deirdre) Yeah, like, Black history doesn’t just have to be... I was on a panel recently. They were, they were kind of talking about- archives for Black folks are different than for White folks because we, especially for archives, you know, like sometimes for newspaper articles, like you know we associate them with like these big buildings where we keep these written documents and stuff. And for Black people, we have some of that stuff but it’s a little bit more complicated than that. And we talked about how we’re our own archives, and one of the things we were talking about that I think that maybe an 11 year old kid might take from this is that our archives are everywhere. They’re in our people. We’re kind of very oral tradition people. (Incomprehensible) But one thing I’ve never forgotten when I came home and did a lot more work in the community is, it’s not just about, you know, what’s in the binder there. You know, it’s about the older community members come walk with me in different places and they tell me “Did you

know that the iron works over at the jail were made by a Black man?" "Did you know that this building was built by Black people?" That we had a business over here, that we had this, and we had that. Um, because it makes things more real. And it makes them understand that, no, you're part of the foundation of this community. You're not an outsider. You're part of things, so it's not just about who the famous person is who came here. It's about like, "Hey man! Black people built those fortifications." "Black people built that road!" And they should know those things. The recipe for this. I like cooking recipes and things like that and all those things. Our history is in so many things. It's in the food that we eat.

(Interviewer) There's amazing tradition in food, like with the Black culture.

(Deirdre) Yeah! So like it's in, it's in like all of those things. So like, those are some of the other ways that you can sort of convey that history.

(Incomprehensible)

(Interviewer) Um, so, sort of wrapping it up a bit here, I wanted to ask you, maybe, what the hardest part about, you personally, is discussion Black history? Is there anything challenging for you to speak about?

(Deirdre) Um... There are certain topics that are a little bit more, I guess you would say triggering for me than others, but they're important. This is less of a Canadian conversation but I do spend time- Lynching is always a difficult conversation for me because there is a personal family history involved in that. Um, I don't typically have a hard time talking about it because, and talking about different topics. Slavery is obviously a difficult thing to talk about, but one thing that I've kind of learned – I'm going to quote from (incomprehensible), you can tell I'm an academic because I'm quoting from (incomprehensible). He was an amazing historian. He just died recently. And when he talked, he's one of the foundations that was talking about the history of American slavery. And you know, people would say "Oh, do you have a hard time talking about the history of slavery?" and things like that. And I don't because one thing that he said is that "Knowing that somebody was enslaved doesn't tell you everything about them." And sometimes we treat it as if it does. It doesn't bother me talking about it because while I wish we had more full pictures of the lives of enslaved people in Canada, we don't quite have the robust literature that they do have like in the Caribbean or in the United States. But while we don't have those things, we do have some things. And I do know that, yes this person was enslaved but that isn't all that they were. They had a favourite colour, they had a family, they were probably funny. Like, so, I don't mind talking about those things. I think the hardest part, most of the time with me, is not talking about these things! Honestly it's dealing with the audience, depending on who it is. It's probably the hardest thing about it. Talking about it is not hard for me. The only hard thing for me sometimes is if people want me to talk about myself, it's always a weird, there's always a weird thing you avoid. I'm a historian, I'm used to talking about other people so I'm not good about talking about myself. But there are groups of people.

It depends. Some people are really receptive to the history. And I tailor my discussions to the audiences that I have. Like, you know, when I speak here, some of my own research covers some pretty dark stuff. And I know that for some other Black researchers, they've even said to me, like I don't know how you're doing this, uh, like it would way on my psyche too much. Things like that. I won't talk about those topics if I'm in the community. I usually like to talk about like more positive things. And I tailor things for that, but sometimes the audience can be very reactionary. And that's because- students are usually great. Students are usually really really open. They're, I've never had a problem with students. They're usually like, I used to work at the Josiah Henson Museum and I used to do a lot of group tours. Kids were always wonderful! Right? They just wanted to learn about everything. Like you would show them different things. Adults? Weird stuff sometimes with adults.

(Incomprehensible)

(Deirdre) We had like discussions about Canadian slavery and all of those things. And the amount of people that would fight with me about Canadian slavery... Um, that it didn't happen here, that it wasn't as bad so we don't have to talk about it, right? And I was like, "But we do have to talk about it." Like when we talk about Chatham, when I first talk about it, like, yes, this is an Underground Railroad area and that where the bulk of the Black population came from. But the Black story doesn't start there. It starts with slavery. The first Black person we have recorded here was an enslaved man. And I can't tell you very much about him, I just have his name, Frank, but I don't think it's fair to leave him out of the story. And so many Black communities, especially in Ontario, are like that. And it's like, yeah it's a Black community with like three people of colour, but when you look down into it like, spots in Kingston, spots in Toronto, spots in... all over the place! Belleville, like Brantford, all of those places. Yeah, there's lots of Black people who came in the Underground Railroad but there's also slavery before that. And people just have visceral reactions to it. And sometimes, having to deal with it is a bit of a minefield. On the one hand, you kind of want to be just like "Listen!" I mean, I'm already casted as like a very angry Black woman as it is but that's just the nature of the beast. Bu it's kind of hard because you have to maintain your composure and you have to understand that there are a lot of White folks in Canada, they just don't know, and they're ignorant and you gotta remember that as hard as it is sometimes, you have got to be patient with people. And that they just, they don't know about it and they're hearing about it for the first time. And sometimes, people take things, like when you're discussing things, like a personal attack.

(Incomprehensible)

(Deidre) And sometimes with Black history, when you're talking- Inevitably when you're talking about Black history, it bothers me when we can't talk about Black joy, but we have to talk about the elephant in the room every time. And people need to understand, and I think it's a hard thing for them to understand, that this isn't a personal moral failing

of you when you learn about this history. You're not a bad person because this happened. What we want you to know is that this happened and try to do better.

(Incomprehensible)

(Deirdre) And I think that the hardest part of my job is trying to balance my anger over things because there's a little part of you, especially when you're a Black person, you start to get tired of explaining yourself all the time and like having to justify your community all of the time. But on the other hand, you have to... It sucks having to be the bigger person all of the time. And you want to be like, "Listen, you have to know this." And you, you need to know this why are you so resistant to it? At the same time, I understand that as frustrating as it is, if I want things to change – and I do – that I have to be patient with people, and I have to understand that, they just don't know these things. Like, most people are not malicious. We live in a very racist society. Institutional racism is just that. But we've treated over the years, this is a problem. We treat racism as if all it is is a personal moral failing. That's how we teach racism. We say, "These people are racist." We don't talk about the system. I mean listen, we have perfectly nice Whit people who are contributing to the system- They don't even know it, right? And it doesn't mean that they're bad people. And I think that's a hard concept for people and I think that's the reason why some folks get this very visceral feeling when you talk about some of these subjects. Because they get taught all their lives, they get shown all these pictures like the 1960s lunch counters and they think that you're calling them those people. And I'm not. "No, that's not what we're talking about here." So, I think that's the hardest part about my job. I don't think I have a problem ever talking about this kind of stuff.

(Incomprehensible)

(Deirdre) But I think the hardest part is that certain audiences and, because they don't know, because they weren't taught in a particular way, and that they were taught that if we talk about racism, that means that you're a morally bad person. And I think that's the issue, they have this visceral "I'm not a bad person!" "This didn't happen!" Instead of having a conversation about what needs to be had, you know, everybody kind of has to get their back up. So, I think the hardest part for me and a lot of my colleagues is trying to remain calm – and sometimes you can't. Trying to remain calm and slowly, as much as you don't want to, you gotta hold people's hands through it. So, I think that's like the hardest part of it.

(Incomprehensible)

(Interviewer) I want to give you a chance to leave us on one note. If you could, I know it won't, uh, cover everything, but if you could choose something, one sentiment that we could carry forward with and finish this conversation with, what would it be?

(Deirdre) Give me a minute... If I could say something to perhaps maybe Black folks that could be looking at your exhibit here, um, and maybe some White folks might be

able to take something out of this, this is partially because it has become something important to me, my grandmother always talks about my great-grandmother and about how much she always wanted a headstone because she always wanted people to know that she was here. And I would say to any Black people who are looking at your exhibit whether they have been in Canada for eight generations, from Nova Scotia, or they just got here from Nigeria, that someone knows that you're here and we've been here. And our history, it's not just a footnote, it's not just a cute little side project that you take, that's segregated. We are a part of Canadian history and Canada does it in so many communities across Canada. The very first settlements in the 1600s, they don't exist without us, without our work, without our culture, without any of those things. So, I think that's what I would say to people.