

DIFFER / END: The Caledonia Project

A new Canadian play.

Text by Gilbert Garratt

Directed by Andy Houston

Dramaturgy by Lisa O'Connell

Researched and relived by students of the University of Waterloo's Drama Department.

As the mist rose early in the morning of April 20, 2006 Ontario Provincial Police officers attempted to end a 52-day land-claim occupation of a southwestern Ontario construction site by members of the Six Nations reserve. Armed with M16 rifles, tear gas, pepper spray and Tasers, the OPP moved in and arrested 16 people.

By 9 a.m. hundreds of protestors returned to the site. Fires were set. Roads were blocked. Protestors climbed on vehicles and waved Mohawk flags while police helicopters roared overhead. "As long as it takes." vowed a protestor. A call was sent out to other reserves to send more demonstrators. As night fell, busloads of supporters arrived at the site, the newly developed subdivision of Douglas Creek Estates, in the small town of Caledonia, Ontario.

Today the land stands empty. The existing homes struck down, their infrastructure torn out. Even the topsoil has been removed and sold off. Twisted and broken lamp standards guard paved roads that negotiate the land of this stillborn suburb and lead to nowhere.

How could this happen? How could a burgeoning subdivision in a bedroom community become the battleground for a 200-year-old land claim dispute? Could it happen in your neighbourhood? Is the land under your home disputed? In our modern democracy where differences are acknowledged and even celebrated, how could this happen?

These were a few of the questions asked by the student-researchers from the University of Waterloo's Drama Department as they made their way to Caledonia during the fall of 2007.

Over a period of several months, under the supervision of Professor Andy Houston, twenty-five students conducted extensive first-hand research. They spent time with and interviewed people of the town of Caledonia, people of the Six Nations Reserve, native historians, people who watched the dispute from their backyards, and people who have traveled from outlying communities drawn to issues of land and justice. Now the students are ready to share their experiences and discoveries with all of us who share the land.

DIFFER / END: The Caledonia Project performances take place at 7pm, February 7, 8, 9 and 14, 15, 16.

Studio 180, Hagey Hall, University of Waterloo

Tickets \$12 general, \$10 seniors, students

Box Office: 519.888.4908

REVIEW OF DIFFER/END from the UW newspaper:

Differ/end: The Caledonia Project
Cait Davidson - staff reporter

Sometimes it's awkward and uncomfortable. Heart-wrenching, cathartic. The truth often is. It's a show, but it's more than a show. It's an honest confession of human failures. Everyone should see Differ/End: The Caledonia Project at least once. I've seen it twice, and I still want to see it one more time. The production is art, exposing a story of indignity and telling a tale, but every time you watch, you will get something new from it.

Director and professor Andy Houston assigned the research for the show as a class project for his drama 301 class, dramaturgical analysis. The class is designed to teach students how to properly design a play, through research and inspiration. The course involves the study of the framework of a production, considering historical, cultural and political aspects. The framework here is the ongoing land dispute in Caledonia between the Six Nations and land developers. For anyone unfamiliar with the issue, in February 2006 Six Nations protestors staged a protest against a developer building a subdivision on disputed land. The situation escalated and became a source of contention across the country. Outside agitators and angry residents in

Caledonia protested the Natives' right to dispute the land, and the police were called in to handle the situation, which continued to escalate. Differ/End follows the path of the researchers, studying to understand and put together the show on the land claim situation, which is part of the larger Haldimand Tract, the land given to the Six Nations in 1784 in gratitude for their assistance to the British during the American Revolution. To this day, the dispute remains unsettled.

Watching for the first time, there were parts in which I was lost, and didn't understand. The host leads you down a path of trickery and frustration, though at the end of the show it comes together clearly. The show itself is very interactive and intimate. It demands that a person be paying attention, and since it is set in a studio, the audience is already incredibly close to the actors.

The beauty in this show is that there is nothing more displayed than the truth. The issue is examined from the sides that weren't looked at in the major media. Throughout the production the performers share their personal experiences, and force the audience to examine their own personal opinions on the matter.

Throughout the production, photos, videos and audio interviews are shown; the interviews forced those of us watching to realize this is a real issue, with real people involved. People hurt and injured; no matter what side you believe is right, you begin to understand the human suffering on both sides of the issue.

The production was deeply affecting and thought-provoking. The actors showed a deep emotional investment in the situations, showing the depravity people can sink to, as well as the generosity and humility that would be needed to eventually settle the situation. **"Did this really happen here – in our Canada?"** is a question you may find yourself asking as the performers deftly display their experiences with the people of Caledonia. Some of the interviews and things said were surprising; at one point a First Nations man was quoted, saying that he believed the police were doing

a good job, when one would expect him to feel animosity toward the police and Canadian authority.

The program and play used the illustration of putting together a pie as putting together something tenderly and carefully, the pie representing the solution to the conflict, which the production argues will need to be a "negotiated solution." The director, cast and crew truly succeeded in baking a pie. During the intermission of the play, the audience is allowed to go into a room that contains the class research, the dramaturgical accounts. Once in there, the audience is encouraged to view the research and draw their own conclusions. Following the performance, the cast serves pie and there is a question and answer session, which allows anyone with any questions to voice their opinions and get the actors and directors' opinion and thoughts on the play.

Caledonia is continuing its run from February 14 to 16. As well, the production will be put on again this summer. Staying true to the course, Differ/End may be changed by the summer, as it will keep up to date on the current issues surrounding Caledonia and the current land disputes in Canada.