

PRESENTATION OF FEATURE-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY

Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance, 1993

Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance is Alanis Obomsawin's best-known film. Screened around the world, it has won over a dozen international awards and was the first documentary to be awarded Best Canadian Feature Film at the Toronto International Film Festival.

With this film, running 1 hour 59 minutes, the director brings a valuable Indigenous perspective to what is often referred to as the Oka Crisis or, by many Indigenous people, the Kanehsatà:ke Resistance.

In July 1990, in an area of Oka sacred to the Mohawk people, a golf course expansion set the stage for a historic armed confrontation between the Mohawks (Kanien'kehaka) and the Quebec provincial police, and later the Canadian military. This major event made international headlines and is imprinted on the collective consciousness of the country.

Alanis Obomsawin filmed Kanehsatake from behind the barricades, working with a small crew and on her own. Originally approved for a four-day shoot, she ended up staying in Kanehsatà:ke for the entire 78 days of the conflict, vividly capturing the constant tensions and threat of violence that the besieged endured on their side of the razor wire.

She recorded so much footage that it took her editor, Yuri Luhovy, six months to view it all.

The film features footage from the center of the action taken during day and nighttime that reveals the physical and verbal confrontations between protesters and the police.

The film also includes testimonies from Kanien'keháka activists, including Ellen Gabriel, an artist and spokesperson for the community during the conflict. A sequence in the film shows drawings by the artist Robert Verrall and archival footage that traces the history of the relationship between the Kanien'kehaka and the settlers, placing the Kanehsatà:ke resistance in historical context.

Though for much of the Canadian public the events of Oka seemed to come out of nowhere, the director was able to show how this incident was the result of the legacy and permanent reality of colonial dispossession experienced by the community of Kanehsatà:ke.