

Crimes of John A. Macdonald

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1. Founded Canada on stolen land

Macdonald is called the "Father of Confederation" for signing the British North America Act of 1867 that created Canada. But this "accomplishment" created a colonial settler state built on the colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples, and the national oppression of the Québécois. Two years later Macdonald bought "Rupert's Land," nearly a quarter of the continent, from the Hudson's Bay Company, without consultation of its population. As Macdonald admitted, "All these poor people know is that Canada has bought the country from the Hudson's Bay Company and that they are handed over like a flock of sheep to us." But the history of Canada is also the history of resistance, from the 1869 and 1885 rebellions during Macdonald's time, to Idle No More today.

2. Residential Schools

Resuming his role as Prime Minister in 1878, Macdonald continued colonial oppression, expanding residential schools. As he said in 1879:

"When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly impressed upon myself, as head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men."

Residential schools were Canadian concentration camps, and included torture and medical experiments.

3. Imposed a racist head tax

Macdonald extended his racism to anyone who did not represent "the Aryan race and Aryan principles." In compensation for Chinese migrant workers dying to build the railway he's credited with, MacDonald imposed a head tax and attacked their right to vote. As he said in 1885, "When the Chinaman comes here he intends to return to his own country; he does not bring his family with him; he is a stranger, a sojourner in a strange land, for his own purposes for a while; he has no common interest with us...has no British instincts or British feelings or aspirations, and therefore ought not to have a vote."

4. Executed dissidents

Not content with crushing the 1885 rebellion, Macdonald wanted to make an example of its leaders. He transferred the Métis leader Louis Riel from Winnipeg to Regina to ensure a white Anglophone jury, used the ancient British high treason law that carried the death penalty, and refused to consider a flood of petitions in support of Riel. As Macdonald said, "He shall hang, though every dog in Quebec shall bark in his favour." Macdonald also incarcerated Cree Chief Poundmaker, and used a mass execution of Cree warriors as a public spectacle. As Daniel Paul -- Mi'kmaq author of *We Were Not the Savages* -- wrote, this was

"the largest mass execution in Canadian history. The First Nations People abiding around the area, living in various states of starvation and malnutrition, were forced to watch the executions. The following is what the Father of Confederation had to say about it: 20th of November, 1885: In a letter to the commissioner of the Indian Affairs: **'The executions of the Indians ought to convince the Red Man that the White Man governs.'**"

January 11 is a day to remember Canada's first Crime Minister, to celebrate the struggles that resisted his policies, and to keep building movements challenging his legacy.