

## **Contested Histories of Racialization and the Legacies of Sir John A. Macdonald**

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The year 2015 marked the bicentenary of Sir John A. Macdonald's birth and sparked renewed interest in his legacies and the contested histories of race and racialization in Canada. One version of a monolithic history of Canada venerates Sir John A. Macdonald for his role as Canada's first Prime Minister, a paternal figure of Confederation, and a nation builder who implemented projects of infrastructure and industrial development (i.e., Canadian Pacific Railway) and systems of land tenure and ownership. This dominating story of Macdonald's legacies reflects a historical canon of biographies, dramatic plays, musicals, guided tours and monuments such that Macdonald's history is conflated with a founding history of Canada. By contrast, diverse and different stories about human erasure, physical and cultural displacement, and assimilation—notably, of Black, Asian, and Indigenous peoples—are made marginal by the dominating discourse of so-called Canadian national progress.

The essays presented in this issue of the *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry (JCRI)* (Volume 3, Number 1) contest dominant interpretations of the legacies of Sir John A. Macdonald by offering theoretical, performative, and experiential analyses of Canadian history, race, colonialism, and Indigenous cultural resurgence. This issue opens with an image and accompanying statement provided by Métis curator Erin Sutherland. Sutherland curated "Talkin' Back to Johnny Mac," a series of public performances and interventions in Kingston, Ontario that addressed Macdonald's colonial legacy (See Kerr, 2015 and Murray & Carl's essay in this volume). The cover image is taken from a moment in a performance held before the city park statue of Sir John A Macdonald by Tahltn artist Peter Morin, entitled *Salt. Washing. Beuys. Fat. Royalty. Copper. Canadian*

*Club. John. Locked. Bear. Drum. Circle.* Morin's portrayal in this moment of what Sutherland calls "the stifling of Indigenous presence" in Canada was followed later in the performance by Morin's retooling of the Macdonald statue to enunciate his testimony to Indigenous resurgence.

Timothy Stanley's essay on the formation of a racist Canadian state follows. Through an analysis of House of Commons debates from 1885, Stanley reveals how Sir John A. Macdonald's promotion of the exclusion and expulsion of Chinese immigrants, and the denigration and attempted annihilation of First Nation and Métis peoples, mobilized discourses of biological racism that were not uniformly shared by all members of parliament. Stanley presents Macdonald and his acts as evidence of the shifting narrative grounds of white racism in newly independent Canada. In turn, Stanley argues against recent apologia for Macdonald or his acts as solely a product of his times -- a position that, we agree, only reinforces his culpability in racism -- by arguing that as Prime Minister, Macdonald innovated forms of racism as his distinctive contribution to what Stanley calls "racist state formation" in newly independent Canada. Stanley asserts that disenfranchisement and land dispossession were essential tools for Macdonald's cultural practice of racism and colonization.

In her essay, Leah Decter offers a critical evaluation of whiteness in the context of settler colonialism in Canada through her own artistic and performative interventions into the Macdonald bicentenary and its resonances within spaces of education and civic life. By foregrounding and disturbing icons of white settler inhabitation and possession in the common, public spaces of Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Decter's artistic performances also function as subversive commemorative acts. Reflecting upon both current scholarship and the interactions of witnesses with her performance, Decter exposes dominant histories of Canada, white settlement, and Indigenous peoples, as well as offers insight into the persistence of colonial mentalities that her artistic practice attempts to disturb and transform.

For Laura Murray and Paul Carl (Obiziindan Animitagozi Noodin), the normalization of a dominant discourse of Sir John A. Macdonald is made manifest in the buildings and monuments scattered throughout the City of Kingston. Often promoted to both tourists and locals as Canada's first capital, Kingston is the home of several statues of Sir John A. Macdonald as well as of historic residences and commemorative plaques bearing his name. In their essay, Murray and Carl replace theoretical investigations of race with their personal and individualized experiential analyses of place. In so doing, they expose the impact of Sir John A. Macdonald's legacy on their everyday experiences of the city. Murray and Carl invite the reader to consider the effects of the erasure of Indigenous histories from public spaces and invite new narratives that are all too often silenced by practices of settler colonial commemoration.

We are pleased to welcome Laura Pascoe to our editorial team. As Managing Editor, Laura was instrumental in the management and production of Volume 3, Issue 1 and we are grateful for her commitment to and support of this volume.

In part, our location in the City of Kingston and the combined predominance of prisons in our landscape and cultural histories of incarceration in our midst have inspired our next Call for Submissions on the topic of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) in Canada—coming soon! We encourage you to share word of this, and other opportunities for publication in *JCRI* to scholars, activists, and community organizers located within or beyond the academy, as we aim to advance Canadian and international scholarship on race and racialization.

### References

Kerr, M. (2015, January 9). Rethinking Macdonald. *Queen's Gazette*. Retrieved from <http://www.queensu.ca/gazette/stories/rethinking-macdonald>