

The demonization of John A. Macdonald is tiresome

By Conrad Black

As Tristin Hopper and Jamie Sarkonak thoroughly outlined in the *National Post* this week, the national orgy of mistaken identity-self-flagellation over the moral and ethical, historic and current character of Canada, and particularly the singling out and dispatch to the stocks for constant public ridicule and denigration of the country's chief founder, John A. Macdonald, has excavated a new low in official self-denunciation. A fine Victorian home in Kingston, Ont.,



Bellevue House, which Macdonald occupied for only two years in the 1840s has been renovated and reopened as a historic

site in order to highlight what the invited lecturer Channon Oyeniran described at the reopening on May 18, as Canada, like the United States, being "steeped in racism, colonialism, white supremacy and other legacies of enslavement." These sentiments were echoed by other speakers.

These are lies. They are entirely and exclusively lies. Canada as a self-governing jurisdiction has never had one day of slavery, not one slave. The French regime in Quebec had only a handful of slaves when it passed to the British crown at the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763. The French had a system of self- emancipation through indentured work, but the British accelerated that and the slaves were emancipated. When Upper Canada (Ontario) was set up as a separate province in 1791, the first governor, John Graves Simcoe, declared that slavery would soon not be tolerated in the new province and banned any new slaves from entering Upper Canada and declared his intention to emancipate any that did enter. In this Canada preceded the British Empire by 42 years. In the 30 years prior to the U.S. Civil War, Canada received, emancipated, and assimilated into Canadian society as complete equals over 40,000 fugitive American slaves. In that time Canada gave shelter to many of America's abolitionist leaders, including John Brown, the model for the principal character in Harriet a Stowe's uncle Tom's cabin Josiah Henson, and the much admired emancipationist Harriet Tubman who now graces the United States \$20 bill, who considered herself a Canadian. No country in the history of the world has received immigrants from all over the world more open-mindedly or with more official and public cordiality than Canada.

Macdonald's real home, Earnscliffe in Ottawa, is the residence of the British high commissioner, and fortunately is not subject to the Orwellian inanities of Parks Canada. (Brian Mulroney, when prime minister, asked me to see if I could persuade then British prime minister Margaret Thatcher to give up Earnscliffe in exchange for another excellent residence which Canada would build to British specifications. She was well aware of the history of the house and refused to hear of any such suggestion.) Bellevue House is thus the only publicly available home of the chief founder of the country and a report on the renovation and relabelling process states that the whole process, which took from 2018 to 2024, was

accelerated by “the confirmation of residential school mass graves sites findings in 2021.” After six years it wasn’t much of an acceleration; there were no such mass graves, and there has been a thunderous failure to confirm even that they were graves at all.

Every conceivable item in the house is, to paraphrase Parks Canada, “steeped in false imputations of racism, and encoded in false representations of colonialism.” Thus, Macdonald’s furnishings were made from mahogany apparently hewn by Caribbean slaves and his hair-comb was made from turtles that are now, 200 years later, endangered. Decoration of parrot-bird designs in the house exhibited in ways that are not explained the “perceived social and intellectual superiority” of the white race. All of this is also lies. Parks Canada has no idea by whom the trees that produced mahogany furniture for Macdonald’s house were chopped and transformed into furniture, and at the time he lived in the house, slavery had been abolished in the British Empire. It may safely be assumed that the turtles which, when they died, possibly of natural causes at the age of 100 or more, and yielded part of our first prime minister’s hair combs, were not an endangered species and in any case, that he was not aware of it.

In the official introduction to the house, while Macdonald is credited with being a principal founder of this country, that is completely mitigated by the accompanying accusation that from delusions of racial superiority he tormented Canada’s Indigenous people and was entangled in a culture of malicious white supremacy and was in addition a corrupt machine politician, unlike the first president of the United States George Washington. (Washington was a great man but he was also a slaveholder, though he did also emancipate them in his will, unlike Thomas Jefferson. He was also a slaveholder and a great man, and he helped launch the United States with the assertion that “all men are created equal,” but he never got around to emancipating his slaves, including the one with whom he had

seven children.)

Macdonald had native allies, he gave the native people the right to vote, and his objective in all his policies involving the Indigenous people was to assist them in participating fully and equally in Canadian life. Some of the policies were poorly administered, many of them were unsuccessful, but none was discredibly motivated. Even in the time of Lincoln, Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, and Bismarck, John A. Macdonald was recognized as a great statesman including by all of the aforementioned, (except Bismarck who did not know him). He chiefly conceived the only transcontinental bicultural parliamentary Confederation in the history of the world and it is now among all countries with 20 million people or more the senior surviving national political structure apart from those of the United Kingdom and the United States. When Canada was established as an independent Confederation in 1867, the United States was recovering from a terrible civil war in which 750,000 people died of a population of 31 million, the United Kingdom was wrestling with the second Reform Act to expand the democratic electorate, neither Germany nor Italy were unified, Japan was a medieval hermit state, Russia an absolute monarchy, and France was about to jettison the carnival Second Empire of Napoleon's nephew-that was three French Republics ago. Macdonald not only founded this country, he chiefly built the railway, largely across the Canadian shield, an engineering wonder of the world, which united the country and prevented the secession of what are now the prairie provinces to join the United States. He established Canada as an independent nation opposite the British and Americans at the Washington Conference of 1871.

The demonization of Macdonald is tiresome. But the cowardly and dishonest complicity in this process of the political establishment of this country at every level and of the faddish weaklings so preeminent in our elites and so lacking in any knowledge of or respect for the history of this country

is an unmitigated disgrace. It is indeed, to borrow French usage, a form of intellectual treason and it is up to the federal government to set the historical record straight. It is also time to require a revisitation of colonialism. In this country, it was the settlement by the French and British and ultimately all the nationalities of the world of every colour in an underpopulated country. Canada has one of the most easily defensible histories of any country or people and the current prime minister is the chief author of this ghastly and mortifying process of moral self-mutilation. The resolution of that problem is obvious, and the new regime that replaces him should, as a priority, sack the entire senior echelon of Parks Canada.

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