

## Concerning the John A Macdonald statue in Victoria Park

I moved to Regina 21 years ago. In order to get a feel for the place, I walked. Beautiful place, but I was stunned to see a statue of John A Macdonald statue in the middle of the City. As a Métis man, I was puzzled why citizen here choose to celebrate someone who had never been here. Knowing that Louis Riel was hung in Regina, I was surprised to see Macdonald rather than Riel memorialized. John A Macdonald refused to commute Riel's death sentence for treason, was an architect of the reserve system and Indian Residential School system, and of anti-Indigenous strategies ranging from the aggressively assimilationist to the genocidal.

The statue is not an artifact of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was not installed soon after Macdonald's death, but in 1967, during the rise of the Indigenous rights movement. The object is not history, it is a deliberate and perpetual provocation of Indigenous people. The placement of this statue is not a neutral act. It is a provocation designed to remind Indigenous people what happens to those who resist colonization. There are no statues of John A in all of western Canada. There was one in Victoria, at the entrance to the City Hall, but they removed it as an act of reconciliation. We need to do the same.

I avoid the Park. In the first years I was here, I only visited once a year. I started leaving small nooses at the foot of the effigy on Nov 16, the day Riel was executed. One year I left a full sized noose. It was a private response. Nearly seven years ago, I thought about doing something more public. For the 2014 anniversary of Riel's killing, I worked with Dunlop curator, Blair Fornwald, and performed *Dear John, Louis David Riel*. Dressed as the spirit of Riel, I petitioned Macdonald in pantomime, and eventually turned my back on him and went into ceremony. Jan 10, 2015, with curator Erin Sutherland, I remounted the performance in John A's hometown of Kingston; and as a counter monument and in reaction to Canada 150, and the Riel opera, I restaged the performance in Ottawa. Three years ago, wearing a golden Riel suit, I did a related performance in Regina called "Dear John, It's not me, it's you." This time: Riel: speaks and tries to convince John A to retire with him to the nearby Museum.

It's up to you what to do with this statue. But in its place, I recommend a conciliation medicine garden tended by Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks, a living memorial to Indian Residential School survivors.

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