John A. Macdonald, “the Chinese” and Racist State Formation in Canada

Timothy J. Stanley
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Abstract: In 1885, John Alexander Macdonald took the right to vote away from men racialized as Chinese on the grounds that they were biologically different from “Canadians” and that their presence threatened “the Aryan character” of Canadian society. Through the 1885 Electoral Franchise Act, Macdonald was seeking to consolidate colonial expansion into the west by constituting the federal polity around the owners of private property, i.e., of land that had been converted from the collective control of Indigenous people. As elsewhere in the world, European colonialism in Canada involved taking control of Indigenous people’s territories and converting it to the private ownership of European colonizers. Making ownership of property the key to membership in the federal polity explains Macdonald’s initial support for giving the vote to women. It also explains why his legislation gave the vote to Indigenous people who met the property qualification. For Macdonald, ownership of private property was the final proof of an individual’s acculturation to colonial dominance. Property-owners from China, by contrast, threatened European dominance in British Columbia. Basing exclusion on alleged biological difference made it inescapable and permanent. The 1885 Act was thus a key moment in forming the racist state in Canada. Indeed, the strong opposition to Macdonald’s introduction of biological racism, including in the Canadian Senate on the part of his own appointees, underscores the significance of this change, one that would have consequences for racialized and excluded groups for many years to come.

Keywords: racism, property, colonialism, state formation, Canada
Introduction

John Alexander Macdonald is remembered in English Canadian nationalist discourse as the father of the Canadian Confederation, the country’s reputed first Prime Minister, the one who first made work the political arrangements that today constitute the country (e.g., Government of Canada, 2015, Jan. 12).\(^1\) In the following article I argue that, if Macdonald was the father of Canada, he was also the father of biologically defined Canadian white supremacy as an organizing principle of the state. Macdonald introduced biological racism into Canadian state formation in 1885 when he effected the exclusion from the right to vote of anyone who was “a person of Mongolian or Chinese race” (Canada. Parliament. House of Commons [Commons Debates], 1885, vol. xvii, p. 1582), on the grounds that they were biologically distinct from “Aryans” and that their presence in the country threatened what he called “the Aryan character of the future of British America” (p. 1589). Macdonald disenfranchised those of “Mongolian or Chinese race” through the Electoral Franchise Act, a piece of legislation designed to create a federal franchise system that he would personally control and that he later called “the greatest triumph of my life” (Macdonald, as cited in Creighton, 1998, p. 475; see also Stewart, 1982). Although this was the first time in Canada that an explicit appeal to biological categories of race was used to organize legal discrimination, and one of the first times that discrimination based on biologically-defined racial categories was legislated in the British Empire, biographers of Macdonald have either overlooked this incident completely, or have explained it away as the unfortunate outcome of his personal prejudices, ones that were widely shared with his contemporaries. For example, Donald Creighton’s (1998) classic biography mentions the Electoral Franchise Act and Macdonald’s comment about his greatest triumph, only to argue that Confederation and the building of the transcontinental railway were his greatest triumphs. Richard Gwyn (2011) goes to some length to defend Macdonald from

---

1 Glossing Macdonald’s actual title as Prime Minister is key to nationalist logics. In fact Macdonald was the first federal “Premier” following the Confederation of three British North American colonies in 1867. He served in this capacity from 1867-1874 and again from 1878-1891. The first Premier of something called “Canada” was Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine, who became the head of the government of the Province of Canada (the union of Upper and Lower Canada) in 1840. The first “Prime Minister” of Canada was William Lyon Mackenzie King who assumed that title following the 1931 Statutes of Westminster that granted full independence to Canada and the other British dominions (Australia, New Zealand and South Africa). Until that time, the “Prime Minister” was the head of the British Imperial Government in London. Macdonald’s actual role in Confederation has long been contested. Alastair Sweeney (1976), for example, has argued that George-Etienne Cartier is the true father of Confederation. For a recent critical evaluation of Macdonald’s actual work as Premier, see Dutil &Hall (2014).
a charge of being racist, noting that Macdonald’s attitudes towards the Chinese were lamentable, but understandable, while in other respects his racial attitudes were ahead of his times. In effect, they argue that Macdonald’s racism was, at worst, a minor moral defect and evidence that he, like the rest of us, was a flawed human being.

In the following, I argue that reducing Macdonald’s racism to individual prejudice and a sideline to an otherwise distinguished career is both empirically and theoretically flawed. As I will show, far from reflecting the prejudices of the age, other members of the Canadian Parliament, including some of Macdonald’s own supporters, strongly contested his characterization of the Chinese and other East Asians; they rightly saw him as introducing invidious distinctions that were unprecedented in British parliamentary tradition. Macdonald himself also clearly explained that Chinese disenfranchisement was central to his larger project of forming a transcontinental state. Reducing racisms to individual or even collective prejudices also ignores how racist systems work, and plays into the continuing denial of the racisms that characterize the dominance of racialized Europeans in Canada. At the same time, as Wolfe (2016) forcefully argues, racialized categories and the racist state systems that organize them into the world do not come into sudden existence fully formed, nor do they follow a universal template arising out of natural differences; rather, they are shaped by unique histories of exclusion and resistance in specific contexts (Wolfe, 2016). Thus, Macdonald’s disenfranchisement of racialized East Asians was a key moment in the formation of the racist state in Canada, one that continues to have effects into the present.

Racist State Formation

I use the term *racist state* deliberately. This usage builds upon, but departs from, that of many scholars who refer to the “racial state” (Goldberg, 1993 & 2002; see also Omi & Winant, 1994). I have long argued that the sorting of human populations into different groupings, which we today know as “races,” is not the product of some essential difference between these groups, but rather are the product of racisms that signify certain differences in specific historical contexts (Stanley, 2012). My analysis of racisms builds upon the work of the Robert Miles (1989) and David Theo Goldberg (1993); however, I depart from Miles (1989) in that I see racisms as material social organizations and not merely ideologies (Stanley, 2011). I depart from Goldberg (1993) in that I am more open to probing processes of racialization, including the ways in which particular categorizations come to be. I agree with Goldberg (2009) that in the end racisms are exclusions and that it is exclusion and not racialization that needs to be
overcome. I also depart from many critical race scholars who see race as an ontological category (for e.g., Gillborn, 2008). Thus, part of my antiracist project is to disrupt the taken-for-granted nature of racial categorization and to establish how racisms organize racializations into exclusions (Stanley, 2011; 2014). I see racisms as the active process of structuring social relations around racialized differences. In effect, I see racisms as making race, not the other way around (Roman & Stanley, 1997). The term racist state renders racisms, rather than race, as the active process in state formation.

My anti-essentialist approach to racisms has a number of historical advantages (Stanley 2011; 2012). First, I recognize that racisms exist in the plural. Thus there are different racisms, each with their own histories and consequences; no single racism is the prototype for all the others (following Miles, 1989). While different racisms may come together in a given context, as indeed we will see has been the case with Macdonald’s anti-Chinese racism and the racism against Indigenous people inherent in English Canadian colonialism, these linkages are circumstantial and not part of the essence of racialized dominance. Racisms that come together in one time and place can disaggregate in another; individuals, and state systems for that matter, can be racist with respect to one racism and antiracist with respect to another. This understanding leads to probing the histories of specific racisms as they arise from specific contexts. Second, all racisms, to be considered racism, must meet three conditions (Miles, 1989; Goldberg, 1993). The first condition is that they must involve racialization, i.e., the sorting of populations into mutually exclusive groups usually defined on the basis of alleged phenotypic or fundamental cultural differences. Racializations consequently are always relational; to racialize a group is to position it in relation to at least one other. If this other group is the dominant one, it possibly will be unnamed. Racializing representations thus do not record pre-configured difference, but rather actively recreate them. This leads to the historical question of how racialized groupings come to be invented and re-created. As social constructions, it is possible to trace historically the invention and reinvention of racialized categories as many have shown (e.g., Allen, 1994; Delacampagne, 1983; Hannaford, 1996; see also Ignatiev, 1995; Rodeiger, 1991). In particular, as the historian Edward Beasley (2010) shows, racialized understandings in nineteenth-century Europe did not emerge overnight, but rather systems of racial categorization were variously rejected, contested and re-invented. The second condition is that racisms organize these racializations into exclusions (following Miles, 1989; see also Arendt, 1979). Racialized exclusions are purposive and enacted by human beings, even if over time they can become
common sense and taken for granted as just the way the world is. Their invention and creation should be traceable historically. Third, to be racism the resulting racialized exclusions must have negative consequences for the racialized and excluded. This last condition differentiates the racialized exclusion involved in racism from that involved when those who are oppressed by racism find it necessary to come together in the absence of their oppressors (Miles, 1989). It also draws attention to the idea that racisms as systems can only be properly understood if attention is focused on the self-representations of the excluded with respect to the effects of their exclusion. As the excluded variously endure, accommodate, or resist specific racist practices, racisms themselves change and so can be traced as dynamic systems of social organization. In this respect, antiracisms begin with the resistance of the excluded, but antiracist knowledge begins with engaging their meanings (Stanley, 2012; see also Stanley, 2011; 2014).

Modern state systems play a key role in organizing racisms and in licensing inherited racist practices. In his landmark text, “Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,” Stuart Hall (1980) argued that racial categories are the articulation of societies structured in dominance, and are neither the result of innate differences between groups nor side effects of more fundamental economic processes (see also Slack, 1996). While he does not discuss the role of the state in this text, its clear implication is that, as the main mechanism of dominance, the state organizes racisms. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) argued that racial state formations involve the articulation of different racial categories in such a way that, when one category shifts, the others re-articulate, i.e., their relationships to the state and to each other change. Meanwhile, Michel Foucault (2003) argued that the disciplinary processes involved in the creation of the modern nation state had as their very purpose the organization of racisms. David Theo Goldberg echoes Foucault’s argument, but rather than seeing race and the state as separate entities, sees the development of one as directly tied to the development of the other. As such, for Goldberg, racial orders are not in addition to state formation, they are state formation. This conceptualization also underscores the linkages between metropolitan state formation and colonialism: colonialism requires the regulation of colonizers and colonized peoples alike, which in turn shapes metropolitan politic structures (Goldberg, 2002, pp. 50-51). More recently, Goldberg (2009) has also argued that there are different regional racial formations, each of which work very differently. For example, he suggests that “racial Americanization” grows out of the United States’ history of slavery and segregation in close proximity. Thus it is different
from other regional racial regimes. He also reminds us that racisms are fundamentally exclusions, and that the antiracist project is ultimately one of ending exclusion (Goldberg, 2009, pp. 66-105). Although Goldberg’s account of the development of different regional structures of racism is highly suggestive, his is not a historical account. In this respect, Patrick Wolfe’s (2016) provides an important corrective. Wolfe too is alive to the connection between colonization and racial state formation, as well as to the importance of context and anti-essentialist approaches. However, he elides race and racism, suggesting the latter “seems redundant since race is already an ‘ism.’”

However, much theorization of racial states reifies the state; what the state does, and how, is rarely specified. Here, it is useful to call attention to Philip Abrams’ (1988) description of the state as really consisting of two things: the state system comprising the institutions of government and its agents, and who have definite material relationships that can be traced; and the state project, which is the processes of legitimating the operations of the state system, including masking their essential violence. People engage in legitimating the state system, without necessarily being in its direct agents (Abrams, 1988). This conception allowed Corrigan and Sayer (1985) to trace the development of English state formation as “cultural revolution.” Although they do not discuss racisms, regimes of knowledge, taken-for-granted racialized geographies and received social and political practices, can also be seen as cultural systems. These knowledge-making systems are central to the creation of colonized and hence racialized dominance (see for e.g., Cohn, 1996; Mawani, 2009). Bruce Curtis (1988; 1992; 2001; 2012) has used Abrams’ conceptualization of the state to great effect in tracing the emergence of government-controlled schooling in what is today Ontario and Quebec, as well as in the creation of the Canadian census. As he rightly points out, there are multiple state projects that are at play, sometimes in contradictory ways (Curtis, 2001, pp. 37-38). This conceptualization bears multiple advantages. It creates a researchable agenda, one focused on the creation and extension of the racist state system (as Macdonald is doing in 1885). It also traces the legitimating discourses that racialize and hence justify the state system in organizing exclusions even as they ensure that those in the dominant position are insulated from the all too real consequences of these exclusions on the racialized and excluded. Finally, it enables Wolfe’s (2016) agenda of observing race “in operation, as a set of classificatory regimes that seek to order subject populations differentially in pursuit of particular historical agendas” (Introduction, Racialization section, para. 1).
Racist State Formation to 1885

Racist state formation was not new in Canada in 1885, but its pre-1885 forms often differed from its post-1885 forms. Indeed the racialized exclusion of Indigenous and Black people had been organized already into the state system: in the former case through formal regulation, in the latter case through customary practices. Meanwhile in British Columbia, legislation also discriminated against Indigenous people and people from China. However, this earlier racist formation was built around notions of cultural difference rather than appeals to biology. The racism of cultural difference is often referred to the new racism, when in fact it is very old (Barker, 1981).

Cultural racism was evident in the regulation of racialized relations between Indigenous peoples and European colonizers. At the beginning of British control in what later became Canada, the *Royal Proclamation of 1763* prohibited the transfer of Indigenous lands to anyone other than the British crown. Thus, from its very beginning, a major part of the colonizing project was the government-organized conversion of Indigenous people’s property into the private property of Europeans. Treaties, while theoretically establishing formal equality between Indigenous nations and Britain, further defined the boundaries of colonial authority (Wolfe, 2016). Following the transfer of responsibility for managing Indigenous-European relations from the military to the local colonial governments, treaties consolidated these land transfers, and specific legislation starting with Canada West’s *Gradual Civilization of Indians Act* of 1857 defined the boundaries of Indigenous lives. Confederation further consolidated the exclusion of Indigenous peoples by making the federal government solely responsible for “Indian affairs.” This effectively removed so-called Indians from participation in provincial jurisdictions. Following Confederation, the federal *Indian Act*, and especially its consolidation of 1876, further regulated who was and who was not “an Indian,” while circumscribing the lives of Indigenous peoples through a web of government regulation (see Miller, 2014).

“Enfranchisement” was a key element of government policy towards Indigenous people and showed cultural racism at work. First proposed in 1857 by Canada West’s *Gradual Civilization of Indians Act*, enfranchisement was intended “to encourage the progress of Civilization among the Indian Tribes in this Province, and the gradual removal of all legal distinctions between them and her Majesty’s other Canadian Subjects” (as cited in Miller, 2014, p. 317). Under the provisions of the *Gradual Civilization Act*, adult male “Indians” could apply to give up their status as Indians at which point they would be examined by an appointed board to determine whether they had reached an appropriate standard
of civilization. If successfully examined, they would be “enfranchised” and would receive a portion of reserve land as their private property. In effect, the entire thrust of Indian policy was to affect the cultural genocide of Indigenous people by ensuring that they absorbed the values and cultural practices of the colonizers while leaving their own practices behind. Significantly, the marker for civilized status, i.e., being culturally European, was ownership of private property – property that was originally that of Indigenous peoples.

Black Canadians by contrast faced few overt legal discriminatory enactments, but were subject to a series of state-sanctioned and communal practices, which Barrington Walker has described as a Canadian version of Jim Crow (Walker, 2009). Most Blacks entered Canada as the property of European colonizers and customary law rather than overt legislation maintained their status as property until the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833. In the 1840s and 1850s several thousand escaped slaves from the United States also entered Canada West. People of European origins tended to perceive these newcomers and long-established populations alike as low status, uneducated and uncultured. The result was what Walker (2012) calls considerable Negrophobia. This had significant consequences for African Canadian populations including residential segregation, segregated schooling, enforced impoverishment, petty and not so petty discrimination including a court system actively biased against them (Bristow, 1994; McLaren, 2013; Walker, 2010).

Cultural racism underlay the creation of explicitly racist legislation directed at Blacks: the creation of Black separate schools in Canada West. As Kristen McLaren (2004), has shown, despite the permissive wording of the 1850 School Act that allowed for the creation of these schools at the request of “five Negro families,” in fact African Canadians were forced into segregated schools by their white neighbours (see also Walker, 2012, p. 26). Although calling for segregation on the grounds that “Negroes” were a different species was not unknown, such calls were strongly contested (McLaren, 2004, p. 32); most called for segregation on cultural grounds. For example, according to Chief Justice Beverly Robinson in 1854, many white parents felt

an apprehension that the children of the coloured people, many of whom have but lately escaped from a state of slavery may be, in respect to morals and habits, unfortunately worse trained than the white children are in general, and that their children might suffer from the effects of bad example. (as cited in McLaren, 2004, p. 33)

Thus, it was the culture of Black people, or at least what white spokespeople alleged that culture to be, that required their separation from white children.
Following Confederation, British Columbia also systematically excluded people of Chinese origins, along with Indigenous people, from participation in the new state system. By 1885, the white minority that controlled the British Columbia legislature had enacted a series of restrictions against the Indigenous majority, and against people from China who were possibly the second largest group and certainly the majority population in some areas such as the Cariboo (Galois & Harris, 1994). These discriminatory measures included blocking them from the provincial franchise and from land pre-emption rights (Stanley, 2011; see also Roy, 1989). However, once again these measures did not invoke race as the basis for organizing exclusion (Stanley, 2011, 61-65).

1885, Property and the Electoral Franchise Act

In context of these histories, the Electoral Franchise Act did not so much invent the racist state as recalibrate and systematize it and redefine the terms of its racism. It brought a different kind of racism into the organization of the state. The Act was in many ways the culmination of the colonizing project that Macdonald had overseen throughout his career. It came into being while the success of the expansion of the Canadian state system into the west was being assured: the House of Commons was debating the legislation as the Northwest Rebellion was being put down and the Plain’s Cree were being subjugated militarily (Tobias, 1983). No longer would Indigenous people pose a serious threat to the Dominion, or so it appeared to Macdonald and his colleagues. The transcontinental railroad also was nearing completion and had demonstrated its value during the Rebellion by ensuring the consolidation of Canadian dominance across the continent. The bill itself enacted racist state formation in three ways. First, it extended the state system across the newly colonized territories by creating a separate federal electoral system. This system was one that Macdonald himself would control through the judicious use of patronage. According to Gordon Stewart (1982), Macdonald thought that the system would ensure that the Tories would control Parliament forever, which is why he thought it was such a triumph. Second, by giving the franchise to those who owned or rented significant amounts of property, the bill reinforced the dominance of private property owners, which represented a final sanctioning of the ending of Indigenous control over the land. In this respect, the addition to the bill of women and status Indians (Indigenous people identified as Indians under The Indian Act) to the bill, provided they met the property qualification, was as much about reinforcing the idea that all owners of property should enjoy political rights and that the collectivity of private property owners (i.e., all those other than
Indigenous peoples who still collectively owned their traditional lands) should be the federal polity (those for whom the state system existed), as it was about equal rights (see Strong-Boag, 2002). Third, the bill changed the terms of the relationships of Indigenous people and racialized East Asians to the emerging state system that Macdonald directly controlled. Since it fundamentally reworked the organizational principles of the state system, it is not surprising that the bill’s various provisions encountered considerable resistance.

Ownership of property was at the heart of the bill, as was the reinforcement of the power of those who controlled private property: property owners and renters of significant land. For Macdonald and many of his contemporaries, control over property was the marker for respectability and civilized status in the community (Strong-Boag, 2002; see also Wolfe, 2016). As noted earlier, ownership of private property was the final proof of the success of colonization. As Macdonald and his contemporaries were well aware, other franchise arrangements also were possible. For example, in establishing its voting system, notwithstanding the exclusion of Indigenous people and people from China, British Columbia established what was otherwise universal adult male suffrage (An Act to make better provision for the Qualification and Registration of Voters, 1876, s. 2). By defining the federal polity, the bill was in effect establishing those for whom the state system existed. In this respect, Veronica Strong-Boag (2002) is quite correct in characterizing the discussion of the legislation as “The Citizenship Debates” and as “a key moment in Canadian rights talk” (p. 70).

Constructing the franchise around ownership or rental of property of a certain value also legitimized other operations of the state system. To have value, property must be available for sale within a market. This presupposes that it has been transferred for the original Indigenous owners, who themselves did not have access to such a market because they could only sell to the federal government. In addition the property must have been surveyed and its boundaries registered. The availability of such property was a sign that colonization had succeeded in wiping out prior claims to the land. As the Electoral Franchise Act was being debated, for the first time the Canadian state system was establishing its power to divide Indigenous territories into private lots for sale in the West.

Consolidating the power of private property owners underlies Macdonald’s attempt to extend the franchise to women. When he initially proposed the bill, Macdonald gave the franchise to women who met the property qualification. Although Macdonald expressed fairly strong feminist commitments in justifying the measure to the House of Commons, as Strong-Boag (2002) suggests his
statements were very much about ensuring that all those who controlled property were in the federal polity (p. 77). To be sure, a certain amount of political opportunism no doubt also lay behind this measure; part of Macdonald’s calculus was almost certainly that if he gave the vote to women, they would vote for him. However, he dropped the measure when it became evident that many of his own members opposed the provision.

Contesting Voting Rights for “Indians”

The nature of the Electoral Franchise Act’s recalibration of Indigenous people’s relationship to the Canadian state system becomes evident when its provisions were debated in the House of Commons (see Strong-Boag, 2002, pp. 80-87). David Mills, a member of the Liberal opposition (Vipond, 1994), asked Macdonald what the term “Indian” meant in the clause defining a person as “including an Indian.” Macdonald made plain that “if they have the necessary property qualification,” Indigenous men could vote whether they lived on reserve or were “enfranchised” under the Indian Act (Commons Debates 1885, vol. xvii, p. 1484). Macdonald was well aware of the enfranchisement system; he had introduced it while he was the Attorney General for Canada West and had integrated it into the first federal Indian Act (1869) while he was the first Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Despite being enacted by the Liberals, the 1876 Indian Act consolidated a series of measures originally introduced by Macdonald, including enfranchisement (see Smith, 2014; see also Miller, 2014). Thus, Mills was correct in believing that giving the vote to Indigenous people men who still lived on reserve was a major shift in government policy.

Mills’ reaction was incredulous; he pointed out that Macdonald was proposing giving the vote to people who could not even legally enter into contracts. He then asked whether the measure would apply to Indigenous people in Manitoba and British Columbia. The House of Commons Debates records the following exchange:

Sir John A. Macdonald: “Yes.”
Mr. Mills: “Poundmaker and Big Bear?” [reported leaders of the Rebellion]
Sir John A. Macdonald: “Yes.”
Mr. Mills: “So that they can go from a scalping party to the polls.”
(Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xvii, p. 1484)

Mills then proposed an amendment that would have given the vote to “Enfranchised” Indians only, which was eventually voted down.
As Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Macdonald was well aware that the enfranchisement policy was a complete failure. Between 1857 and 1876, only one person had been enfranchised and his band had refused to grant him any of its property (Miller, 2014, p. 321). At the same time, Macdonald personally knew a number of Indigenous people who were integrated into the dominant society of the times. These men and women were often educated; at least one was a medical doctor and several were Christian ministers. Some members of the English and French Canadian establishments came from mixed Aboriginal-European backgrounds. These included people in his social circle, his cabinet and among his correspondents (Smith, 2014). As he later explained to Mills,

> the Indians living in the older Provinces who have gone to school and they all go to school who are educated, who associate with white men, who are acquainted with all the principles of civilisation, who carry out all the practices of civilisation, who have accumulated round themselves property, who have good houses, and well furnished houses, who educate their children, who contribute to the public treasury in the same way as the whites do, should possess the franchise. (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xvii, p. 1575)

For Macdonald the markers of education, property ownership and the paying of taxes placed such people culturally in the same position as “whites.” However, as Macdonald well knew, most reserves were not divided up among individual landholders, and many Indigenous communities in Eastern Canada were in decline. For example, by 1820 the Mississauga had declined to approximately 150 in the Bay of Quinte area and 100 around Kingston (Smith, 2014, p. 61). Thus, very few Indigenous people were in a position to meet the property qualifications, and, for Macdonald, those who did were sufficiently integrated into dominant values that they posed no threat to the European regime of property. If anything, giving voting rights to those who did meet the property qualification without requiring them to surrender their Indian status further integrated them into a state system premised on the extinguishment of the right to the land as Indigenous people. Macdonald was apparently also motivated by the belief that the new Indigenous voters would vote for him (Strong-Boag, 2002, pp. 80-87).

Western Canada, where Indigenous people were the overwhelming majority of the population, was a different matter. From such things as reports from his reserve commissioner, Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, Macdonald would have been well aware that the reserve system in British Columbia meant that most Indigenous people lived in poverty and that under the provincial property regime they were barred from pre-empting land (Harris, 2003; Tennant, 1990). He also
was aware that in most of the prairies, the end of the buffalo hunt had reduced many communities to starvation (Miller, 2014). Thus, few Indigenous people in western Canada were likely to exercise this right to the franchise. However, as Mills’ comments suggest, opening up this possibility at the moment of the Northwest Rebellion was too radical a step for most members of the House. In the end, Macdonald amended the legislation to exclude all Indigenous people living west of Ontario from the franchise.

Although on the surface it appears that Macdonald’s views on the franchise for status Indians were progressive and even antiracist, in fact his position is almost entirely based on the racialized exclusion of Indigenous people and their cultural systems and modes of governance. For Macdonald, the whole point of western expansion was to open up space for the resettlement of people of European origins racialized as white, i.e., to convert Indigenous lands into the private possessions of “white” property-holders. He consequently failed to engage with Indigenous people when they objected to his policies intended to convert them into private property owners.

Meanwhile, his other policies, such as those implemented through the 1869 Indian Act and the Gradual Civilization Act, empowered him to replace traditional governments with elected band councils, caused many women and children to lose their status as Indians, and effected the severe disruption of Indigenous cultures through residential schooling. He continued his enfranchisement policy at the national level despite the protests against it on the part of Indigenous leaders in Canada West (see Miller, 2014; Smith, 2014). Although several Indigenous people groups and leaders supported Macdonald in including them in the franchise, many others rejected the franchise on the grounds that they were sovereign nations as did the Six Nations Council of Grand River in 1886 (Smith, 2014, pp. 79-80). And, while he did negotiate the numbered treaties in Western Ontario and the Southern plains that ostensibly recognized the sovereignty of Indigenous people, in practice he used Draconian measures including starvation to get different groups to take treaty and then consistently ignored their guarantees of government support (Daschuk, 2013). His colonizing agenda prevented him from truly engaging with the perspectives and understandings of those whose lands he was seeking to take over (Smith, 2014).

Excluding the Chinese

The same colonizing agenda is evident in Macdonald’s disenfranchisement of the so-called “Chinese.” The term “Chinese” is increasingly a racializing ascription during this era. People from China had little sense of being Chinese,
other than of belonging to a civilization which included places like Korea and northern Vietnam; they were subjects of the Qing Empire, nationalist Chinese identities has yet to emerge, and most people identified with the home county or family origin. (Stanley, 2011, esp. pp. 73-5 and p. 173). Macdonald first proposed disenfranchising people from China by amending the clause defining a “person” to read “a male person including an Indian and excluding a Chinaman.” He argued that this exclusion was due to the fact that “Chinamen” were “foreigners” who had “no British instincts or British feelings or aspirations and therefore ought not to have a vote” (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1582). Further, they did not contribute to the country:

[W]e know that 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. (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1582).

In 1885, the members of the House of Commons were familiar with this kind of cultural argument. British Columbia members such as Arthur Bunster (Commons Debates 1878, Mar. 18, p. 1207); Amor de Cosmos, (Commons Debates, 1879, Apr. 16, pp. 1251-1260); and Noah Shakespeare, (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xvii p. 1591) had been using cultural arguments to propose restrictions on the so-called Chinese since 1878. For example, Arthur Bunster had called for barring people of Chinese origins from working on the railroad on the grounds that,

Canadians should take measures to protect themselves against the introduction of a population so detestable, and prevent their manhood from degenerating through the use of the opium drug ... and other evils ... which had been introduced by these people, and which gave cause for serious reflection to every father of a family as to the difficulties of guarding against them. (Commons Debates, 1878, vol. iv, p. 1208)

However, in Ottawa, early calls for exclusion met a rocky reception. Articulating an ideal of liberal internationalism (Anderson, 2006; see also Anderson, 2007), the Liberal Premier Alexander Mackenzie rejected such calls as unseemly for a “British community,” in which people were afforded asylum “regardless of color, hair or anything else.” He further pointed out that those from Hong Kong were “as much British subjects as were the hon. members” and that not all shared the characteristics they were being accused of holding (Commons Debates, 1878, vol. iv, p. 1209). The problem with cultural arguments in favour of exclusion, as Macdonald soon found, was that not everyone had the same cultural characteristics; people can and did change their cultural practices, and not
everyone in 1885 accepted what later scholars came to call “race-thinking” (see Arendt, 1944; Barzun, 1937).

Although Macdonald’s amendment introduced Chinese exclusion in cultural terms, similar to the kinds of provisions that the British Columbia legislature had already enacted, the idea of such exclusion still ran counter to the liberal internationalism of many members of the House of Commons, and not just on the opposition side. The independent Peter Mitchell (see Spray, 1990) argued,

Every person who comes and lives in this country, and labors and spends his money in the country, even if he is a foreigner—a Chinaman, if you like, the most disliked class of foreigners—if he comes to make Canada his home, we ought to make Canada free enough to include even the Chinaman (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1582).

According to Mitchell, the Chinese merchants of Montreal were “a respectable body of men—good, peace-loving citizens.” Even the Chinese should have the vote, “So long as they comply with the naturalization laws [and] they become British subjects” (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1582). Mitchell’s comments led George Eliott Casey, a member of the Liberal opposition, to rather innocently ask whether naturalized “Chinamen” ceased to be “Chinamen” and became British subjects (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii; see also Library of Parliament, ‘Casey, George Eliott’). In response, Macdonald thanked the member and changed the amendment to exclude “a person of Mongolian or Chinese race” (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1582).

During the 1870s and 1880s, ideas on race were still relatively fluid in European culture. What Edward Beasley called “separate, physically distinct and physically inheritable races, with different mental and moral characteristics” was far from universally accepted (Beasley, 2010, p. 1). “Race” was commonly used to refer to “types” rather than well-defined human subspecies (Beasley, 2010; Banton, 1998). As Beasley (2010) notes, “race” even referred to social types such as in “the race of London cabdrivers” (p. 2). It could also refer to national or ethnic origin. Thus, there were “Chinamen” just as there were “Englishmen,” “Frenchmen” and “Scotsmen.” Although, as we have seen, nineteenth century English Canadians were certainly familiar with racializing terminology such as “Negroes” or “whites,” “race” would continue to be used to refer to ethnic or national groups well into the twentieth century (see for e.g., Siegfried, 1907/1966). Indeed, the census only began asking questions about race, which it defined as “colour,” in 1901. Previously, it asked about religions and national origin, although it allowed “African” as a possible national origin. For example, the 1881 census instructed enumerators: “Origin is to be scrupulously entered, as
given by the person questioned; in the manner shown in the specimen schedule, by the words English, Irish, Scotch, African, Indian, German, French, and so forth” (Department of Agriculture, 1881, p. 26). It is this later version of “race” as origin or nationality that had been used to effect Chinese exclusion in British Columbia. For example, the *Qualification and Registration of Voters Act of 1876* provided that “No Chinaman or Indian shall have his name placed on the Register of Voters for any Electoral District, or be entitled to vote at any election of a Member to serve in the Legislative Assembly of the Province” (*An Act to make better provision for the Qualification and Registration of Voters, 1876*, s.3).

Herbert Howe Bancroft illustrated this lack of consensus over the status of “race” in his 1883 *Collected Works*, a book that Macdonald and many other members of Parliament almost certainly had read. In the era before Darwin’s theories had been widely accepted and in which Darwinian ideas were still very new in Canada, Bancroft noted three hypotheses on human origins: monogenism, polygenism, and evolutionism. Discussing the first hypothesis, Bancroft (1883) stated:

> The doctrine of the monogenists, is ably supported by Latham, Prichard, and many other eminent ethnologists of Europe, and is the favorite opinion of orthodox thinkers throughout Christendom. The human race, they say, having sprung from a single pair, constitutes but one stock, though subject to various modifications. (p. 98)

The second hypothesis was that of the polygenists who held “that there was not one only, but several independent creations, each giving birth to the essential, unchangeable peculiarities of a separate race.” Bancroft identified “Morton, Agassiz, Gliddon, and others in America” as the “sponsors for this theory” (Bancroft, 1883, p. 100). Evolution was “derived mainly from the writings of Lamarck, Darwin, and Huxley” and held that:

> All existing species are developments of some pre-existing form, which in like manner descended by true generation from a form still lower. Man, say they, bears no impress of a divine original that is not common to brutes; he is but an animal, more perfectly developed through natural and sexual selection (Bancroft, 1883, p. 100).

However, after providing a thorough review of all the different theories of human variation, Bancroft (1883) concluded:

> Now when we consider the wide differences between naturalists, not only as to what constitutes race and species,—if there be variety of species in the human family,—but also in the assignment of peoples
and individuals to their respective categories under the direction of the given tests; when we see the human race classified under from one to sixty-three distinct species, according to individual opinions; and when we see that the several tests which govern classification are by no means satisfactory, and that those who have made this subject the study of their lives, cannot agree as touching the fundamental characteristics of such classification—we cannot but conclude, either that there are no absolute lines of separation between the various members of the human family, or that thus far the touchstone by which such separation is to be made remains undiscovered. (p. 107).

Under the heading, “All tests fallacious,” he further noted, “The color of the human skin, for example, is no certain guide in classification” (Bancroft, 1883, pp. 203-204).

Indeed, the issue of race as species would only become settled with the acceptance of Darwin’s theories of evolution. Interesting, Darwinian thought was relatively late in arriving in Canada compared to Britain and the United States. The first major discussions were in 1884 at McGill University (see, Berger, 1983).

Ambiguity in the use of racial terminology also is evident in the 1885 Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, which was presented in the House of Commons a few weeks before the aforementioned debate. The two commissioners, Macdonald’s Secretary of State, Joseph-Adolphe Chapleau, and BC Supreme Court Justice John Hamilton Gray, went to some lengths to show that they did not accept prevailing anti-Chinese views. Indeed Gray’s part of the report systematically debunked anti-Chinese views. Both, however, appealed to the issue of “race” when discussing the assimilability of the so-called Chinese. Grey found that “even though the danger of their coming be imaginary (if not questionable),” since “there still exists, and always will exist the objection, that there is no homogeneity of race between them and ourselves, nor can they comprehend or assimilate themselves to our institutions” (Canada Royal Commission, 1885, p. lxxii). Chapleau, in his report for the Commission (1885) claimed,

the statesman would not be deterred by one or all of these charges, even if established beyond doubt, from encouraging Chinese immigration, were he certain that it brought men and women of whom or of whose children good Canadians could be made. (p. xxxix)
However, he found that the Chinese were, “a nonassimilable race, clearly marked off from white people by color, national and race characteristics” (Canada Royal Commission, 1885, p. cxxx). It is important to note that although the Royal Commission did much to permanently fix the idea of Chinese and Canadian difference, Chapleau is still using the concept of “race” as type here. Indeed much of his part of the report is devoted to determining “the character of the Chinese,” something that he sees as a continuity in the behaviours of people of Chinese origins in different parts of the world (Canada Royal Commission, 1885, pp. xxxix-lxxvii).

Members of Parliament appeared to have been shocked by Macdonald’s final justification for Chinese disenfranchisement. Several members of the House, Matthew Hamilton Gault, Louis Henry Davies and Arthur Hill Gillmor challenged Macdonald’s amendment on the grounds that the Chinese were “industrious people” who had “voted in the last election” or who had “as good a right [to] be allowed to vote as any other British subject of foreign extraction” (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1585). Arthur Hill Gillmor, a Liberal member from New Brunswick (Wilson, 1994), even went to some length to build on the findings of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration to argue that the Chinese were a net benefit to the country (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, pp. 1585-86).

This strong opposition led Macdonald to change his justifications for excluding the Chinese. He told the House of Commons that the Chinese needed to be excluded because,

if they came in great numbers and settled on the Pacific coast they might control the vote of that whole Province, and they would send Chinese representatives to sit here, who would represent Chinese eccentricities, Chinese immorality, Asiatic principles altogether opposite to our wishes; and, in the even balance of parties, they might enforce those Asiatic principles, those immoralities ... the eccentricities which are abhorrent to the Aryan race and Aryan principles, on this House. (1885, vol. xviii, p. 1588)

After questioning how Gillmor came to the conclusions he did, he continued:

The truth is, that all natural history, all ethnology, shows that, while the crosses of the Aryan races are successful-while a mixture of all those races which are known or believed to spring from a common origin is more or less successful-they will amalgamate. If you look around the world you will see that the Aryan races will not wholesomely amalgamate with the Africans or the Asiatics. It is not to
be desired that they should come; that we should have a mongrel race, that the Aryan character of the future of British America should be destroyed by a cross or crosses of that kind. (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1589)

In other words, the Chinese needed to be restricted because they were property owners who, if given the vote, would have political weight and whose presence would contaminate the racial purity of the country. The problem was both their cultural practices and their biology.

**Reactions to Macdonald's Aryan Vision**

Significantly, Macdonald is the only member of the House of Commons or of the Canadian Senate to speak of the “Aryan” nature of Canadian society. Indeed, the term is so unfamiliar in 1882, when he first used it, that the clerks recording the debate in the House of Commons spelled it “Arian” (Commons, Debates, 1882, vol. xii, p. 1477; see also Aryan/Arian, n.d). On this earlier occasion, he stated that he shared the general feeling in Canada and the United States “against a Mongolian or Chinese population in our country as permanent settlers” as the Chinese were “an alien race in every sense, that would not and could not be expected to assimilate with our Arian population.” However, despite their being undesirable, their labour was essential to completion of the railway: “At present it is simply a question of alternatives—either you must have this labor or you cannot have the railway” (Commons Debates, 1882, vol. xii, p. 1477). Macdonald also is the only member of the House of Commons or Senate to put forward the view that the most extreme polygenesist views, representing Chinese and Europeans as biologically different and likely meaning as separate species.

As Macdonald’s subsequent exchange with David Mills shows, he was familiar with late nineteenth century “race science.” Mills accused Macdonald of not being satisfied with an already complex question without introducing “the very large and complicated question of miscegenation.” Macdonald’s views were “not exactly in accord with Pritchard [sic] and Latham, though they may be in accord with the views of Morton, Gliddon and Agassiz” (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1589). In effect, Mills was accusing Macdonald of being a polygenesist, something that Macdonald did not deny. Macdonald also certainly was aware of Bancroft’s work. When a member of the House had earlier pointed out, “Many maintain that the Indians of British Columbia are of the Mongolian race,” Macdonald replied, “That is an
ethnological question that I will leave the hon. gentleman to settle with Henry Bancroft” (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1582).

However, Macdonald’s usage of the term “Aryan” in 1885 goes beyond that of Bancroft. Bancroft names the term in his listing of multiple theories of racial categorization, which includes Blumenbach’s theory of five races: “Caucasian or Aryan, Mongolian, Ethiopian, Malay, and American” (Bancroft, 1883, p. 201). Macdonald’s 1882 usage seems to be consistent with this as “Arians” are listed as one of several possible racialized groups. However, in 1885 while Macdonald is still using the term to racialize Europeans, he appears to be echoing the theories of Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau. Gobineau’s 1851 four-volume Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines developed the idea that “the Aryan race” has founded all major world civilizations, but had become corrupted by interbreeding with inferior races. The Aryans had previously been identified in linguistics as the speakers of the primal Indo-European language from which most European languages were descended. Still for Gobineau, the corruption of racial purity and the relative strengths of purer Aryan groups was the explanation for world history. Although Gobineau’s theory was originally of little more than specialist interest, it was popularized in European during the early 1880s (Blue, 1999; see also Beasley, 2010; Foucault, 2003). In referring to the Aryan nature of British America and warning about the corrupting influence of miscegenation, Macdonald appears to be invoking Gobineau’s idea of civilizations founded by racially pure Aryans only to be corrupted subsequently by intercourse with lesser breeds.

The advantage of basing exclusion on the supposedly permanent features of alleged biology is that changing cultural practices cannot then become reasons for inclusion. In effect, Macdonald had found a reason to permanently exclude the racialized Chinese. He does not make this argument in the case of Africans and indeed explicitly denies that he intends to remove the vote from them. He also admits that he is aware of mixed-race unions involving white and Black people and, as we have seen earlier, he is well aware of people of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xviii, p. 1589). The difference in the racialized Chinese case is not just their alleged biology, but their numbers. He had already told the House that, if their migration was large enough, they would control the vote in BC. However, he was not worried about a population of workers who would be unlikely to meet the property qualifications of the Act, but rather he was concerned about the presence of property-owners from China in British Columbia. In this respect, as Macdonald well knew, the so-called Chinese may have been the majority of the non-
Indigenous people population in British Columbia. While most were workers, they included a significant number of merchants whose economic activity the Royal Commission had documented (Canada Royal Commission on Chinese immigration, 1885, pp. 363-65). In effect, racialized Chinese property-owners threatened the control of racialized Europeans over the regime of property that he was trying to create.

It came to Joseph Adolphe Chapleau, Macdonald’s Québec lieutenant, to make explicit the relationship between European colonialism and Chinese exclusion. Chapleau told the House that, while he was in substantial agreement with Gillmor, “the Chinese” did not want the vote according to the Imperial Qing consul general in San Francisco and that granting it would complicate international relations. Interestingly, although the part of the report authored by Chapleau does record a conversation with the Qing Consul General, it does not mention any discussion of the franchise (see Canada Royal Commission on Chinese immigration, 1885, pp. 363-365). However, Chapleau supported exclusion, not because they are the dirty, unintelligent, criminal class that they are so often represented to be, I do not believe that; I believe that Chinese immigration is a danger to any new country like our own, not because they are a degraded race, but because their immigration might become dangerously large.

He went on to suggest that workers from China were superior when it came to labour competition and that a large presence on their part would constitute a threat “to the particular civilization of America and to our institutions” (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xvii, p. 1590). When he introduced the very next piece of legislation to the House, the Chinese Immigration Act, Chapleau claimed:

> It is a natural and well-founded desire of British subjects, of the white population of this Dominion, who come from either Britain or the other European States and settle in this country, that their country should be spoken of abroad as being inhabited by a vigorous, energetic, white race of people; I say it would be much more pleasant to have this said of the Province of British Columbia, than to have that Province even if it grew richer than it is, with two-thirds of its population composed of a race which is not similar to ours, and which cannot assimilate with ours.” (Commons Debates, vol. xx, p. 3010)

He further suggested that John Sebastian Helmcken, one of the leaders of British Columbia who helped negotiate the Terms of Union, told him that the migrants from China needed to be excluded, “because we want to be here ourselves, and do not want others to be here. You will not consider it strange if we tell you
that as good Englishmen we see no reasons why any men except good Englishmen should live in this country” (Commons Debates, 1885, vol. xx, p. 3009). Although the Chinese Immigration Act restricted racialized Chinese workers and their families, its provisions did not apply to merchants, while those of the Electoral Franchise Act did. In effect, together both acts ensured that the merchants were present to develop the China trade that would pay for the railway, but that they would have no say in governing the country.

The newness of Macdonald’s race-thinking is underscored by the debate in the Senate. When this legislation reached the Senate, Senators were so concerned about the invidious principles it was introducing that they debated whether they could get away with sending it back to the House. Even Macdonald’s own appointees tried to squash the bill.

Sir Charles de Boucherville, a Conservative and a former and future premier of Quebec (Munro, 1998), objected to the Chinese clause on the grounds that it excluded Christians, and he tried unsuccessfully to amend the bill (Canada, Senate, 1885). Alexander Vidal, a conservative from Ontario (Library of Parliament, ‘Vidal, The Hon. Alexander’), could not see “the propriety of excluding the Mongolians who have shown themselves to be patient, industrious and law-abiding, from privileges which are given to every other member of the human family in this country” (Canada, Senate, 1885, p. 1276). Donald McInnes, an independent from British Columbia also appointed by Macdonald, inquired whether the exclusion from the franchise applied only to those “fresh out of China” or also applied to those of mixed race. When he was told that it applied to “any person of Chinese blood,” he protested that this would be a hardship to people already in the county and he could not see how he could support the bill even though he felt he could not oppose it. He also questioned Macdonald claims about miscegenation saying that he knew a resident of Peterborough, “a most respectable citizen” who had married a white woman, was “well connected,” and whose children “were educated in the best schools of the province” (Canada, Senate, 1885, p. 1279). In fact, in the final vote on the bill, McInnes managed to be absent, while de Boucherville and Vidal voted against (Canada, Senate, 1885, p. 1343).

Although in the end the Senate approved the Electoral Franchise Act, Senators almost succeeded in defeating the Chinese Immigration Act, while in 1886 and 1887 they did defeat further restrictive immigration measures and even tried to repeal the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act (Anderson, 2007; see also Canada, Senate, 1885, pp. 1291-1301; 1326-1329). If nothing else, the principled opposition of members of the Canadian House of Commons and Senate to
Macdonald’s Aryan vision gives the lie to the claim of Macdonald apologists that, if Macdonald was racist, so was everyone else at the time.

**Conclusion**

Although on the surface it appears that the enfranchisement of Indigenous people and the disenfranchisement of racialized Chinese were polar opposites, in fact they were united by the same logic of racist state formation. Giving the franchise to Indigenous men who owned or rented sufficient property to meet the qualification ensured the success of colonization, by undermining Indigenous control over the land and integrating them into the new colonial regime of property. Although seemingly inclusive, the Indian franchise enacted the racialized exclusion of Indigenous peoples’ own meanings including their claim that they themselves were sovereign nations. Chinese disenfranchisement ensured that Indigenous lands would be colonized for the benefit of European colonizers and not some other group. In effect, it consolidated European control over private property by barring the only group large enough to threaten their monopoly on the state system. Thus, the *Electoral Franchise Act* articulated the logic of colonization: it completed the transfer of Indigenous lands to the colonizers by absorbing Indigenous people into the colonial regime of property, while preserving the private property so created for the benefit of people from Europe and their locally-born descendants by ensuring that other property owners had no control over the state system. Fixing the Chinese exclusion on the basis of race understood as biology rather than culture ensured that this exclusion would continue indefinitely.

However, Macdonald’s critics were fundamentally correct: once the genie of biological racism was out of the bottle, it had invidious effects on others than the Chinese. The *Electoral Franchise Act* introduced a new and devastating racist logic into the state system, including Indian Affairs. According to James Daschuk (2013), Macdonald had long used a policy of starvation on the plains to force people into the treaty system, but after the Rebellion was put down Macdonald put in place a series of collective reprisals to ensure that the people of the plains never rebelled again. This included imprisoning Big Bear and Poundmaker, who had not participated in the rebellion; publicly executing those convicted of the Duck Lake Massacre following a kangaroo trial at which no translation was provided and hence no defence was possible; and developing the extra-legal pass system under which members of twenty-seven bands were confined on reserve unless they had the written permission of the Indian agent to leave. Perhaps most disturbingly, once people were confined on reserve, Macdonald ordered rations...
cut off, with the result that hundreds died. The negligence of federal officials even affected loyal bands. For example, by 1886 all of Chief Crowfoot’s eight children had starved to death despite treaty guarantees of assistance in time of famine. By the end of the decade, the people of the southern plains had been decimated, while those on the northern plains, who had not as yet been placed under the federal regime of Indian affairs, maintained relatively healthy populations (Daschuk, 2013, pp. 159-180). As the historian Sarah Carter (1993) has shown, the Indigenous people of the southern plains introduced dry land agriculture during this era, only to be removed from the land to make way for European settlers. Macdonald’s Aryan vision meant that the people in the way of European colonization and property ownership had to first be removed from the land, even if it meant their deaths.

Macdonald’s legislation also had significant negative political and material effects on those racialized as Chinese. For the better part of the next century, until 1947 when Chinese Canadians gained the unfettered right to vote in Canada, they were not in a position to shape the federal policies, regulations, and enactments that adversely affected their lives. Discriminatory immigration regulations forced them into isolation and poverty. Meanwhile, Chinese Canadians were only too well aware of their political exclusion and its effects (see for e.g., Kwong, 1922, Oct. 11). Perhaps even more importantly today, exclusion from membership in the state system also meant that those racialized as Chinese and later other Asians, were defined as people who were not and could never be “Canadian.” Nationalist imaginaries still conjure up Macdonald’s “Aryan” as the archetypical Canadian, while racialized Asians face recurring difficulties in being accepted as unconditionally Canadian (e.g., Gilmour, Bhandar, Heer and Ma, 2012).

While it might be too much to hold Macdonald responsible for all the racism enacted in Canada from the end of the nineteenth century until today, and although future federal government leaders used more circumspect language, the racist state that Macdonald began continued to racialize and exclude people who did not fit with his Aryan ideal. At various times, racist exclusions engineered by the state would adversely affect, and often seriously so, Canadian Blacks (Nelson, 2008), Japanese (Sugiman, 2004), South Asians (Johnson, 1989) and Jews (Abella & Troper, 1982) as well as Chinese (Chan, 1983) and Indigenous people (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Ironically, many of these measures would have been sources of pride for Macdonald himself. Perhaps it is time that Canadians commemorate these exclusions and bear witness to the thousands and even millions of lives that they have ruined, rather than celebrate the architects of white supremacy as national heroes.
References


Bristow, P. (Ed.). (1994) “We’re rooted here and they can’t pull us up”: *Essays in African Canadian women’s history.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.


