

Some Activists Want Statues of Sir John A. Macdonald Removed... What Do You Think?

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Image: a statue of John A. Macdonald in Nova Scotia.

Why was the head of a Sir John A. Macdonald statue lying on the ground in Montreal?
The short answer: it is complicated.

On Saturday, a statue of Canada's first Prime Minister was pulled down in Montreal. This caused the statue's head to fall off. As the statue was destroyed, people chanted and cheered.

The statue being destroyed was part of a larger protest against the racism that was (and is still) faced by Indigenous Canadians.

Recently, statues of Macdonald have been targeted and destroyed. This includes a statue of Macdonald in Kingston, Ontario (the city where he lived) which was covered in red paint. And this isn't the first time the statue in Montreal has been targeted. In 1992, protestors knocked the head off the statue and covered it in paint. Protestors say that this is because of the Prime Minister's controversial history.

Why do some people want to honour Macdonald?

Sir John A. Macdonald was Canada's first Prime Minister and was a key part of forming the country. He helped with Confederation, which united British colonies in North America into one country. This became Canada, and created Canadian government as we know it today. He was known as a clever, persuasive, and daring man who overcame adversity to become Canada's leader.

Macdonald was also important in the building of the CPR, a railway that united Canada's provinces, encouraged immigration to Western Canada, and helped develop the Canadian economy. He was very influential in Canadian history!

Why do some people want to criticize Macdonald?

University of PEI professor Omeasoo Wahpasiw said that while most Canadians are happy that Macdonald helped bring Canada together, it didn't come without a cost.

He said, "the railways [displaced] Indigenous people [from their land]. It caused physical harm to many people who worked on the railway, including Indigenous and Chinese Canadians".

Some people say that Macdonald also put laws into effect that created the Indian Act, which removed many rights from Indigenous people. Many people also blame him for the creation of residential schools in Canada.

Macdonald also demonstrated racism towards Chinese immigrants, many of whom were immigrating to Canada to work on the CPR. He helped create a law that forced Chinese immigrants to pay a fee, a head tax, to enter Canada. The head tax rose from \$50 to \$500 over 20 years, and was a huge amount of money to pay.

Some people are against destroying the statues

Many politicians call the destruction vandalism and an illegal action. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that the statues are important for "recognizing the history of Canada" and that "acts of destruction are not the best way to fight for equality".

Trudeau also said "Macdonald was our first Prime Minister, and I think it is important to recognize the role he played in creating this country".



Image: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaking about the statues.

But other people say that destroying the statues sends a message. “It is an important act of protest because it doesn’t hurt anyone, but gets our message across loud and clear. Racism is not welcome here,” said Professor Wahpasiw.

A petition asking the government to remove and replace the statues has reached over 46,000 signatures.

What should happen next?

Some say the statues should remain to acknowledge Canada’s history.

Some people think the statues should have signs added to them that explain the negative parts of the history.

Another solution some people agree on is that the statues should be taken out of public spaces and put in museums.

Finally, some groups think the statues should be destroyed completely and replaced with other influential Canadian heroes, such as Viola Desmond.

What do you think?