



Black Legal Action Centre

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THE UGLY TRUTH

STATEMENT BY THE BLACK LEGAL ACTION CENTRE

July 22, 2020

An uprising is taking place in Canada and throughout the world. The voices of Black, Indigenous and racialized groups are being raised and joined in unison by the community at large. We are demanding transformative change. We are demanding an equitable Canadian society.

To achieve this equity, and take meaningful steps towards a just society for all, it is critical that we understand our past, including the structures, symbols, building and street names that exist and have been erected to commemorate colonialism, racism and cultural genocide. These structures and symbols sanitize the brutal realities of racism and protect and perpetuate white supremacy and discrimination.

The ugly truth is that Canada was built on racism and discrimination: the theft of land from and genocide of Indigenous people; the denial of the right to vote for women; the exploitation and enslavement of Black people to enrich white people; the abuse and murder of Chinese people to build railroads; the internment of Japanese Canadians; the turning away of Jews trying to escape Nazism; the persecution of members of LGBTQ2S+ community. These are but *some* of the examples that reveal Canada's history of violence, racism and exclusion.

Canada's first Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald said this about Indigenous children and their parents:

When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly impressed upon myself, as head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.¹

He viewed people of Chinese and African descent as a separate species:

...if [the Chinese] ... settled on the Pacific coast they ... would represent Chinese eccentricities, Chinese immorality, Asiatic principles altogether opposite to our wishes; and, ... they might enforce those Asiatic principles, those immoralities ...

¹ Canada, House of Commons, *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada*, 5th Parl, 1st Sess, Vol 14 (9 May 1883) at 1107.

which are abhorrent to the Aryan race and Aryan principles ... the Aryan races will not wholesomely amalgamate with Africans and Asiatics. It is not desired ... 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. [T]he cross of those races, like the cross of the dog and the fox, is not successful; it cannot be, and never will be."² [Emphasis added.]

Even by the standards of his time, Macdonald's beliefs were extreme. He was, "the only politician in the parliamentary debates to refer to Canada as 'Aryan' and to justify legalized racism on the basis that [non-white peoples] were a separate species."³

As part of that establishment of white supremacy, statues were erected to celebrate men (yes men, lest the misogyny be forgotten), like Macdonald and Egerton Ryerson, who created and perpetuated inequity and injustice. The statues stand as symbols of violence and discrimination against people of colour. Every day they stand is another day that a message is sent to *all* Canadians about what is revered in our society – about who is valued – and it is not Black or Indigenous peoples. No equity-seeking society should tolerate such symbols, and monuments to racism. Black and Indigenous people are rightfully upset and traumatized by the continued celebration of racist figures. It is time for the statues to come down and be confined to the time from whence they came; history.

It is this history and its current manifestations of violence, exclusion and "othering" that should be the concern of the state, including the police. Instead, over the weekend, the police in Toronto chose to arrest and charge three protestors. The police could have exercised their discretion not to arrest. They did not. These arrests demonstrate that the state is committed to protecting these symbols of white supremacy and racism over protecting the lives of Black and Indigenous communities and those who fight with us.

The state and police should be more interested in enacting and embracing the change that aims to protect Black and Indigenous bodies and lives *at risk today*, rather than protecting the stone, copper and steel manifestations of racists and white supremacists from years gone by.

The case now rests with the Office of the Crown Attorney at Old City Hall in Toronto. The Crown is obligated to drop charges that are not in the public interest.⁴ It is BLAC's position that these charges are not in the public interest. The public interest demands the tearing down of these pillars of racism – *not those who protest their existence*. BLAC urges the Crown Attorney to drop these charges.

² Canada, House of Commons, *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada*, 5th Parl, 3rd Sess, Vol 18 (4 May 1885) at 1588.

³ Timothy J. Stanley, *Commentary: John A. Macdonald's white-supremacist views were shocking, even by the standards of his time* (April 22, 2012), online: Times Colonist <<https://www.timescolonist.com/news/commentary-john-a-macdonald-s-white-supremacist-views-were-shocking-even-by-the-standards-of-his-time-1.21570>>.

⁴ Ontario, Ministry of the Attorney General, *Crown Prosecution Manual* (Toronto: Ministry of the Attorney General, 2018) <<https://www.ontario.ca/document/crown-prosecution-manual>>. The preamble of the *Crown Prosecution Manual* states: "Prosecutors have a responsibility to ensure that every prosecution is carried out in a manner consistent with the public interest."