

January 5, 2019

## Examining the history of racism in Canada

Edmonton – His face is on the Canadian \$10 bill, he was Canada's first prime minister and he was the political broker that helped create the country more than 150 years ago. He was Sir John A. MacDonald. And, as even many of his admirers acknowledge, he was also a man who was crassly racist toward Canada's Indigenous population.

To examine the roots of racism in Canada, five students who are taking the class *Race and Ethnic Relations* at MacEwan University will be holding a roundtable discussion examining the history of racism in Canada. The students and assistant professor Dr. Kalyani Thurairajah, Department of Sociology, will view five different two-minute videos of incidents of racism and advocacy in Canada.

Those include the over representation of Indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system; the 60s Scoop; Japanese internment; the Concordia race riot; and the Oka land dispute. Following the video screenings, each student will contextualize their particular case, and pose questions for the roundtable discussion.

Around the time that Canada started receding from its formal "Indian assimilation" policies of the 1950s, penitentiary and child welfare systems started to assume a new role in the lives of Indigenous peoples. In fact, prior to the 1960s, Indigenous peoples only represented one to two per cent of the federal prison system. The rates have increased every year and today the incarceration rate of Indigenous peoples is now at 26 per cent, while Indigenous peoples only comprise of four per cent.

The term *Sixties Scoop* was coined by Patrick Johnson, who authored the report *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*. It refers to the mass removal of Indigenous children from their families into the child welfare system, in most cases without the consent of their families or bands. The drastic overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system was accelerated in the 1960s, when Indigenous children were seized and taken from their homes and placed into middle-class Euro-Canadian families.

Between 1941 and 1945, over 21,000 Japanese-Canadians—in which two thirds were born in Canada—were forced into internment camps. The Japanese-Canadians were considered as enemy aliens and had their property confiscated. While in the internment camps they were forced to suffer the harsh realities of the living conditions.

In 2000, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to deliver a speech at Concordia University in Montreal, but the street protests stopped the campus from holding the event. On one side was a group called Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights, which advanced its cause with a series speakers, posters, protests, and exhibits critical of Israel. On the other side were many Jewish students who felt the group created a climate of intolerance and intimidation on campus.

**For more information, please contact:**

David Beharry, Media Relations Advisor

780-497-5586

Cell: 780- 231-5954

Email: [beharryd@macewan.ca](mailto:beharryd@macewan.ca)

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The Oka Crisis was a land dispute between a group of Mohawk people and the town of Oka, Quebec, which began on July 11 and ended 78 days later on September 26, 1990. The dispute was the first well-publicized violent conflict between Indigenous people and the Canadian government in the late 20th century.

The Mohawk and other supporting Indigenous peoples erected a barricade blocking the area and the Sureté de Québec deployed an emergency response unit, which responded by deploying tear gas canisters and concussion grenades in an attempt to force the Mohawk's to disperse. In response, gun fire ensued on both sides and after a 15-minute gun battle the police retreated. The police abandoned six cruisers and a bulldozer. Before the raid there were 30 armed Warriors around the barricade, following the gun battle that number grew to 70 Warriors.

When: Thursday, January 10

Where: MacEwan University, City Centre Campus, 7 - 185 (Building seven, room 185)

Time: 2 - 3:30 p.m.

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**For more information, please contact:**

David Beharry, Media Relations Advisor

780-497-5586 Cell: 780-231-5954 Email: [beharryd@macewan.ca](mailto:beharryd@macewan.ca)

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