

Timothy J. Stanley's "John A. Macdonald, 'the Chinese' and Racist State Formation in Canada"

All language used in quotations remains true to source material

Glossary:

Biological Racism: The division of humanity into separate groups based on supposed innate biological differences.

Cultural Racism: The division of specific human groups based on cultural distinctions.

Evolutionism: The belief that people developed from a "pre-existing form" that was a relative to humans.

Monogenism: The belief that humanity was birthed from a single pair of people.

Polygenism: The belief that humanity formed from several different origins subsequently evolving into distinct races.

1. "the State Organizes Racisms"

Racisms are not formed from innate differences in populations. Rather, racisms are formed to sort people into groups which serve to continue the power structures they are within. This is made especially clear when we acknowledge that the formation of racisms is independent; each racism is made for its own purpose and none are a prototype for another, despite overlapping rhetoric. Racisms themselves must meet three requirements to be considered racism: first they must involve a process of racialization based on alleged cultural or other differences (these differences exist in relation to another); second these racisms manifest into exclusions; finally, these racisms must have a negative impact on the excluded. It is fundamental to acknowledge that racisms do not record pre-existing distinctions, but rather create and recreate these distinctions as the excluded adapt to their conditions. Just like the people subjected to racism, like here in the case of Chinese-Canadians, racisms adapt too.

"Racist state"

These racisms are directly reflected into material social organizations, rather than remaining an ideology. The term "racist state" represents this distinction: "the term... renders racisms, rather than race, as the active process in state formation." The organizations themselves that form around racisms "can be traced as dynamic systems of social organizations"; in other words, these systems change to best serve the racist state's purposes. This creates an identifiable agenda for the state which focuses itself on the continuation of dominance whilst remaining insulated from the consequences they create. The racist state itself is primarily constructed by two things: the state institutions of government, and those who work for it, and the state project itself acting to legitimize the authority of the racist state. The state is then able to continue through knowledge-making systems, like schooling and census.

2. "notions of cultural difference"

Pre-1885 racisms in Canada were structured around cultural difference. The agenda of the racist state manifested within this cultural racism by regulating relations between settlers and Indigenous peoples. The denial of cultural overlap is evident in the controlled transfer of Indigenous lands post-1763: the *Royal Proclamation of 1763* dictated that Indigenous land could only be bought by the British Crown. The agenda within the 1763 Proclamation was the government-organized conversion of Indigenous lands into

European private property. This agenda remained into Confederation which dictated that the federal government would solely be responsible for "Indian Affairs," removing Indigenous nations from provincial jurisdictions. The line of colonial motives can further be traced into the federal *Indian Act*, especially after its consolidation in 1876, which allowed the federal government to dictate who was and who was not an "Indian" whilst placing a web of regulations on Indigenous lives.

Enfranchisement: "cultural racism at work"

Exemplifying the role of cultural racism was the use of enfranchisement itself: proposed in Canada West's 1857 *Gradual Civilization of Indians Act*, enfranchisement was meant "to encourage the progress of Civilization among the Indian Tribes... and the gradual removal of all legal distinctions between them and her Majesty's other Canadian Subjects." Removing cultural distinction was thus a strategy employed by the racist state to continue its aims towards assimilation and dispossession. The question of who would get enfranchised would further play a key role in the Macdonald's formation of a biologically racist state.

3. Cultural Racism and Macdonald

Macdonald realized that cultural racism did not have the longevity that the racist state required for indefinite dominance; cultural difference could not be generally applied to groups of people because not everyone in those groups had the exact same cultural characteristics. Exemplifying this idea is in Macdonald's own initial attempt to remove the vote from those racialized as Chinese: he first argued for this disenfranchisement by amending the clause in the *Electoral Franchise Act* referring to a "person" to be "a male person including an Indian and excluding a Chinaman" because, as he argues, they were not inclined to "British instincts." However, this cultural distinction was not sufficient for Macdonald's intentions because it could still be eventually overcome. The adaptation of those groups within a culturally racist system could be incorporated into the state apparatus, thus removing the exclusions intended to be maintained by the racist state. Thus, Macdonald looked towards theories of race which could be utilized to indefinitely claim difference, and thus be perpetually applied to justify exclusions.

4. “three hypotheses”

During the 1870s and 1880s “race” itself was based around declaring “types” of people rather than, as the 1885 *Electoral Franchise Act* made clear, “human subspecies.” This idea of subspecies would only be broadly accepted upon the acceptance of Darwin’s theories of evolution. Prior to Darwin’s broad approval were three theories of human origins, put forth by Herbert Howe Bancroft: first was monogenism which dictated that humanity came from a single pair; there were then the evolutionists believing humanity came from a pre-existing form; finally, there were the polygenists, believing that humanity stemmed from multiple creations that gave birth to entirely separate races on a biological level. Macdonald was a polygenist. Further, Macdonald believed in the theories set forth by Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau. Gobineau’s theories purported an Aryan superiority based on the argumentation that “the Aryan race” had built all major and successful historical civilizations and those empires had been corrupted by “interbreeding with inferior races.”

6. “the Father of Biologically Defined Canadian White Supremacy”

For those who continually seek to defend Macdonald with the argumentation that all people were racist at the time, thus absolving him of his agency of said policies, it must be understood that Macdonald’s biological theorization of racism was a shock to the Canadian House of Commons and Senate in 1885. Members like Sir Charles de Boucherville, Alexander Vidal, and Donald McInnes opposed the bill on various grounds: Boucherville thought that the exclusion of Christians should be amended within the bill; Vidal saw no purpose in the biological distinction, instead believing in cultural distinctions; McInnes disagreed with the blanket disenfranchisement of any racialized Chinese persons because, to McInnes, it did not make sense to make no distinction between new immigrants and longstanding members. Indeed, it was solely Macdonald who put forward extreme polygenist views of biological difference and the corruption of an Aryan British America. Macdonald himself ushered in biological racism to further his Aryan vision of Canada.

5. The *Electoral Franchise Act*: “consolidate colonial expansion”

Enacting Macdonald’s desire for an indefinite and regenerative form of state control via racism was the enactment of the *Electoral Franchise Act* in 1885. Ownership of property was itself at the heart of the bill because of the role private property played in the creation of the colonial state: “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 private possessions.” The *Electoral Franchise Act* enacted racist state formation in three major ways:

1. It expanded the state system across newly colonized areas by forming the federal electoral system.
2. Giving the franchise to owners or renters of private property ensured that private property owners would continue to dictate the direction of the racist state for, presumably, their benefit. This represented a final sanctioning of Indigenous control of their own lands.
3. The biological racism within ensured that “the relationships of Indigenous people and racialized East Asians to the emerging state system that Macdonald directly controlled” would be changed indefinitely. The focus on private property would explain why Macdonald ushered in racial distinctions based upon biological appeals; the inclusion of Indigenous peoples to enfranchisement was based upon the idea that they had met the necessary property qualifications, whilst the disenfranchisement of racialized Chinese persons was because of their large population in British Columbia and their ownership of private property in the province. Their high population and ownership of property meant that they had political weight and could threaten the state (explaining Macdonald’s worry over the “racial purity of the country”) and have a say in state-threatened white supremacy.

7. “Exclusion and not Racialization that must be Overcome”

In defining racism as systems of exclusions, Stanley advances an argument for inclusion to counter the racist state. In moving forward, it is then key for the people within this state structure to recognize and rationalize the processes of the racist state and the exclusions it creates to counter such exclusions. However, it is important to note that, even within Stanley’s own work, inclusion can be utilized by the racist state to embolden the exclusion of others: this is exemplified by the descriptions of Indigenous enfranchisement proposed in 1857 by Canada West’s *Gradual Civilization Act*. Enfranchisement intended to remove any cultural distinction between settlers and the Indigenous communities that they displaced, serving “to affect the cultural genocide of Indigenous people by ensuring that they absorbed the values and cultural practices of the colonizers.” Macdonald would further utilize enfranchisement in the *Electoral Franchise Act* in a seemingly antiracist move, but instead, “his position [was] almost entirely based on the racialized exclusion of Indigenous people and their cultural systems and their modes of governance.” Inclusion is a process which cannot be conducted without understanding the motives of the racist state and should be done carefully as not to reinstate exclusion.

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