

The government should rename public spaces that commemorate historical figures who would be considered racist by today's standards

General background

Like many countries, Canada has a complex history of colonialism, largely tied up with the treatment of the Indigenous peoples who lived here long before the first European settlers arrived.

There are many figures related to Canada's early history who have been commemorated in public spaces across the country — including statues, street names, and building names — who are controversial figures today because of their role in colonization.

For example, in recent years, there have been calls to rename schools and other public spaces named after historical figures such as Sir John A. Macdonald. Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, helped to enact the residential school system in which Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and subjected to abuse in the name of assimilation.

Cities and towns across Canada have been grappling in recent years with decisions related to renaming — whether to keep tributes to historical people who are deemed racist today, or to rename or replace them in the name of reconciliation.

Proponents of renaming these public spaces argue that we must acknowledge the harm caused by historical figures. Removing their names from public spaces is seen as a step toward reconciliation and healing. Opponents believe this erases history and the contributions of such people, arguing that it is important to understand how the context in which they lived is different from today.

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