

Louis riel an innocent hero or deviant villain history essay



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The nineteenth century was a major turning point for the history and began the creation of the identity of Canada. Many crucial figures rose to the top but today their methods of achieving such success is on a controversial debate on the good and evil of their actions. Louis Riel fought for what he believed was the right thing to do; he spoke for and protected the Métis from being taken over by the British. For this he is considered by many to be a deviant and murderous renegade. Louis Riel was executed on November 16, 1885 for treason, but was he the real villain? Though his actions are a clear betrayal to the British Crown he was a hero in the eyes of the Métis; protecting their culture, rights and claims to the land of Manitoba.

Louis Riel stood for the protection of the Métis; and because of his attempt to preserve the Métis way of life; he was considered to be a traitor to the British crown and thus was hanged for six accounts of treason. As the surveyors arrived onto the land of the Manitoba to divide the land for the new-coming settlers; Riel's higher sense of moral obligation took over his actions in an attempt to protect the Métis culture and home. His actions were considered to be a clear violation of Britain's treason act and because of this; his action to protect the Métis deemed him as a traitor. " When a man do levy war against our Lord the King in his realm...or be adherent to the King's enemies in his realm, giving them aid and comfort in the realm and elsewhere...this shall be one ground upon which the party accused of the offence and legally proved to have committed the offence, shall be held to be guilty of the crime of high treason" (Linder). Louis

Riel opposed the government by choosing to take a stance against the British by not allowing the government to establish Manitoba and allow

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settlers in. Riel knew that Métis were considered only half-breed and because of their half Indian half French nature they were considered to be less significant amongst the British. Riel fought for what he believed was naturally good and protected the Métis land and culture from the colonizing Britain. Though Louis Riel actions were in the favor of the protection of the justice for the Métis his actions went against the British demand and violated his allegiance to the British; deeming Louis riel as a traitor.

The Métis alarmed by the possibility of being pushed off their land formed a rebellion led by Louis Riel. The Red River Rebellion of 1869 was a necessary move for the Métis as they were constantly being taken advantage of due to their half-breed nature. When Louis riel was called in to speak on behalf of the Métis he created the provisional government in order to attempt to negotiate with the government as far as possible. After many unsuccessful deliberations, Riel began the rebellion at Fort Garry. The Red River Rebellion was considered to be Riel's first act of treason committed against the British Crown. Hugh Richardson reads Louis Riel's first account of treason at the trial of Louis Riel. "...armed and arrayed in a war-like manner, that is to say with guns, rifles, pistols, bayonets, and other weapons, being then unlawfully, maliciously and traitorously assembled and gathered together against our said Lady the Queen at the locality know as Duck Lake in the said the North-West Territories of Canada" (Linder) Though Riel remained faithful to the British crown he was deemed as a traitor because he stressed that he objected to their entry in the west. The provisional government was seen as a threat to Britain as they were constantly gaining more power and eliminating those who stood in their path to freedom. Riel went against the

British crown by forming a government to rebel against the British methods of colonization leading to the capture of Fort Gary and the execution of Thomas Scott. Riel executed an Orange Lodge member Thomas Scott who opposed his provisional government and swore that he would escape prison and kill Louis Riel. This was a major offence to the Métis rule of law and because of this offence Thomas Scott was found guilty and with a vote of five to two he was executed by a firing squad on March 4th 1870. When news and rumors spread westward about Scott's execution, Riel was seen as a felon and branded a murderer in the Upper Canada. John A. MacDonalld had no choice but to order an arrest for Louis riel as his actions could not be overlooked. John A. Macdonald says " He shall hang though every dog in Quebec bark in his favor" (Folino). This event led the government to see Louis Riel as a national villain and brand him as a traitor against British Crown. Though Louis Riel actions were justified and highly applauded by the Lower Canada, John A. Macdonald could not overlook his actions taken against the British command as it had killed over 200 people. John A. MacDonalld was torn between executing Louis Riel as it would ruin his chances in parliament in the next election if he did or did not execute him. Louis Riel convicted of high treason, was sentenced to death on the sixteenth day of November, 1885 by hanging.

While Louis riel is considered to be a traitor to the British; he is a hero and a savior of the Métis culture. Riel was pushed to act in the manor he did as it was necessary step in order to protect the Métis rights as well as their culture and the dominance over their own land. Riel was a true advocate for the Métis way and seeing a threat to their culture and land he decided to

become a speaker and a leader for them. Louis Riel says in his trial “ It is true, gentlemen, I believed for years I had a mission,” (Linder) Louis riel believed that he was destined to be the protector of the Métis and with this goal in mind he accomplished many great and wonderful changes for the Métis. In December 1869 Louis Riel in attempt to create equality for the Métis created and became leader of the provisional government. He knew that if the Métis ever wanted to join confederation and have the same rights as other colonies they would need a strong and firm government to deliver their desires. John a. MacDonald recognized the begging of their government and saw it as easier and a more peaceful means to negotiate with the Métis rather than send in military and take over the land. Louis Riel introduced another crucial development for the Métis; the Métis bill of rights. The Métis bill of rights was an attempt for riel to not only defend the Métis but defend the entire settlement under the Canadian government control. The Métis bill of rights concluded that the Métis would have the same rights as other nations. They would keep their culture, including the use of both French and English in education and law, as well as the Métis would keep the right to their land. Undeniably he was a true Métis leader and very passionate about preserving the Métis rights and culture. When the surveyors came back and ignored the Métis bill of rights there was only one hope for the Métis. An English Métis named Andrew Spence answered, “ there is only one man who can help us now: Riel.’ Everyone agreed”(Bibbs). When the Métis bill of Rights was ignored, Riel was called back and quickly tried further improve the conditions of the Métis. Riel sent Macdonald a petition on behalf of the Métis asking for provincial status of the North-West Territory; though MacDonald delayed the responses and eventually the Métis grew impatient.

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Louis Riel said in his trial before execution “ I have been quarrelling with an insane and irresponsible Government” (Linder) Louis Riel had only one other option left to protect the Métis rights as the government would not be reasonable or hear to the destruction of the Métis culture caused by their colonization. With the abject pleading of the Métis and the ignorance of the government Louis Riel began the North West rebellion. Riel gathered Métis and native militias in attempt to defeat and hold off the government troops. They killed around two hundred men but in the end the government troops were too powerful and they quickly and swiftly defeated the Métis; Louis Riel was captured. Louis Riel put the needs of the Métis before his own need for safety; even while he was captured by the Métis his main goal was to progress the Métis, tell others of the wrong done to Métis and allow them to keep their own culture and identity.

While Louis Riel improved the lives of the Métis he was also responsible for the development of the province of Manitoba. During the first rebellion, Riel formed the provision government in attempt to help the needs of Métis creating a list of desires for rights and freedoms. Louis Riel speaks in his defense on trial “ I was working in Manitoba first, and I did all I could to get free institutions for Manitoba; they have those institutions to-day in Manitoba, and they try to improve them, while myself, who obtained them, I am forgotten as if I was dead.” (Linder) Louis Riel’s creation of the Métis bill of rights later became the basis for the Manitoba act. Riel was a major influence on the development of the Manitoba act as it was based on his set of rights created by his provisional government. The Manitoba act insured

that the area of the Red River Colony around 1 400 000 acres of land was to become the province of Manitoba.

The act also gave way for the making of French and English the two official languages of the province allowing people in Manitoba to use either French or English in schools and governments. The Manitoba act also gave the society two education systems: Protestant and Roman Catholic and allowed Manitoba to send four members to the House of Commons in Ottawa and two members to the Canadian senate. Louis Riel concluded in his trial his obligations to Métis. “ I know that through the grace of God I am the founder of Manitoba.” (Linder)