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Review of *Louis Riel and the Creation of Modern Canada: Mythic Discourse and the Postcolonial State*.  
By Jennifer Reid

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*Louis Riel and the Creation of Modern Canada: Mythic Discourse and the Postcolonial State.* By Jennifer Reid. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012. xi + 314 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.95 paper.

In the late nineteenth century, Métis leader Louis Riel led two rebellions against Canadian state expansion on the North American prairies. The 1869 Red River Rebellion led to the creation of the province of Manitoba. The 1885 North-West Rebellion, in present-day Saskatchewan, led to Riel's state execution, by hanging. But Riel's legend goes beyond the facts of these nineteenth-century conflicts toward the generation of the most omnipresent and complicated mythology in Canadian politics and culture. It is complicated because Riel has been read in many, often contradictory, ways: as a Canadian founder, an Indigenous anti-colonial rebel, a fighter for Western sovereignty, a messianic prophet, a lunatic, a statesman, and a founder of the new Métis nation.

Thus, Jennifer Reid has taken on a tough task, for what is there new to say about Riel? Reid leverages Riel's mythological fluidity and hybridity into her own claim that his legend speaks to a defining truth about the story of Canadian political and cultural development and the meaning of Canadian identity. In this sense, the book is not fundamentally about Riel himself, for even while Reid offers a meticulous, well-researched history of Riel and the rebellions he led, scholars on the subject are not likely to find anything new in an empirical sense. But that is not the book's point: *Louis Riel and the Creation of Modern Canada* at base is about the role of collective memory in the production of Canadian national identity, with

Riel standing as the central figure in that mnemonic production.

Reid's take on the role of the myth of Riel is that the modern Canadian state really begins in 1885 with the end of the North-West Rebellion, and that Riel's identity and politics both in history and in myth represent the history, development, and potentiality of a *métissage* Canadian identity, a hybrid identity, rather than a homogenous, singular national form. This hybridity, to Reid, was and continues to be produced through the political, cultural, and even violent interplay of English, French, Indigenous, and Métis groups, and it is reproduced via the discourse of Canadian collective memory.

Reid does not claim that hybridity or *métissage* means equality among these groups, and she acknowledges that one key element Riel represents is the role of foundational violence in state and nation creation; that is, violence against racial Others such as Riel himself. At the same time, Reid's book is also an effort to redeem the possibility for a globally unique status for Canadian identity as hybrid, not homogenous, and thus as a way to rethink the meaning of nationhood. I will admit my own skepticism about this redemptive vision, but I applaud and recommend Reid's serious and careful effort to generate a distinct and stable position amid the turbulent and vast sea of Riel scholarship and myths.

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