Who are the Métis? Exploring an Aboriginal Identity

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Early Spring 2016: Thursdays, March 3 – April 7 from 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Room 124, Leeds House Building

Lecture Series Description:
Who are the Métis? Are they a mixed-raced people or a distinct Indigenous nation? The Métis are in fact a post-contact, aboriginal community that emerged from the economic synergy between different fur trading companies and Indigenous peoples in Central and Western Canada (17th to 19th centuries). Initially the children of European men and Indigenous women, the Métis quickly became a distinct nation with distinguishing cultural expressions, political organization, and social frameworks. However, today more than ever, the Métis remain an enigma to Canadian governmental agencies as well as to the general public. Over six weeks, this lecture series will rectify misperceptions of Métis identity by focusing on three elements: 1) reviewing the historical rise of the Métis nation (17th to the 19th centuries); 2) outlining the impact of Canadian colonial policies on Métis people (late 19th to 20th centuries); and 3) discussing the current realities of Métis identity politics both with the federal government and within the communities. This lecture series will provide a grounded and contemporary understanding of a longstanding and vibrant aboriginal community.

Short summary:
Who are the Métis? Are they a mixed-raced people or are they a distinct Indigenous nation? This six-week lecture series will provide a grounded historical and socio-political understanding of a longstanding and vibrant aboriginal community.

All readings will be drawn from the edited volume:

(NOTE: This book is available for online reading from the university library website.)

Did you know? Your registration in the LinR program allows you to borrow materials from Carleton University’s MacOdrum Library. To receive a temporary borrowing card, visit the circulation desk and identify yourself as a participant of LinR.
Schedule of topics:

Week 1 (March 3):
Introduction: “Who are the Métis?”: Questioning and Interrogating Métis Identity in Canadian history
This unit will introduce the subject matter of this course: the Métis. We will look at definitions of the term Métis as well as discuss common conceptions or misconceptions of the Métis throughout Canadian history.
Readings:

Week 2 (March 10):
Métis Ethnogenesis: The beginnings of an Aboriginal Nation (17th and 18th centuries)
This lecture will look at the different forces (social, economic, geographical) that gave birth to the Métis nation, which emerged from the fur-trading empires of the Great Lakes regions of North Ontario and Northern Manitoba into powerful buffalo hunting brigades the Red River Region.
Readings:
St-Onge, Nicole and Carolyn Podruchny. “Scuttling along a Spider’s Web: Mobility and Kinship in Metis Ethnogenesis”: 59-92.

Week 3 (March 17):
Métis Resistance: Generating a Political Community (19th century)
This unit will look into political force of the Métis in the 19th century looking specifically at significant resistance battles at Seven Oaks, Red River, and Batoche in Saskatchewan.
Readings:
Ens, Gerhard J. “The Battle of Seven Oaks and the Articulation of a Metis National Tradition, 1811-1849”: 93-119.

Week 4 (March 24):
The Dark Years: Metis in the Wake of Settler Colonialism (20th century)
This lecture will look into the period of colonial expansion in the Prairie Provinces (that is, dealing with land treaty, scrip, mobility, and marginalization) and how the Métis survived and thrived.
Readings:

Week 5 (March 31):
Métis Nation Today: Means to Recognition (20th and 21st centuries)
This unit will look at the state of the Métis community(ies) today in their search for social and political recognition from the Federal government as well as asserting their distinct aboriginal identity.
Readings:

Week 6 (April 7):
What to do about Métis? Review and Return on the Subject
This last lecture will review our learning from the course and look towards the future. It will review and stress the Métis community defined by a strong sense of Self, which is inspired by a vibrant sense of the past.
Readings:

Recommended readings for continued learning: