



## Riel's Defence: Perspectives on His Speeches

*Hans V. Hansen*

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In 1885, Louis Riel was charged with high treason, found guilty, and consequently executed for his role in Saskatchewan's North-West Rebellion. During his trial, the Métis leader gave two speeches, passionately defending the interests of the Métis in western Canada as well as his own life. Riel's Defence studies these speeches, demonstrating the range of Riel's political and personal concerns. The first and better known of the two speeches addresses the jury, while Riel's second speech - rarely reprinted - addresses the court following his guilty verdict. Both orations have been edited, annotated, and reprinted, and are followed by essays from diverse perspectives including philosophy, law, history, political science, religion, and communication studies. Through the course of their inquiry, contributors come to understand more about Riel's personal character and political thought, as well as his arguments supporting Métis land claims, grievances against the federal government, and his immigration plan for the North-West. Evaluating the rhetorical quality, legal merit, and cultural stakes of his speeches, Riel's Defence reveals the significance of the last public statements made by a man who indelibly shaped Canada's history by combining his personal vision with a national vision.

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