



Donald Creighton: A Life in History

Donald A. Wright

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A member of the same intellectual generation as Harold Innis, Northrop Frye, and George Grant, Donald Creighton (1902–1979) was English Canada’s first great historian. The author of eleven books, including *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* and a two-volume biography of John A. Macdonald, Creighton wrote history as if it “had happened,” he said, “the day before yesterday.” And as a public intellectual, he advised the prime minister of Canada, the premier of Ontario, and – at least on one occasion – the British government.

Yet he was, as Donald Wright shows, also profoundly out of step with his times. As the nation was re-imagined along bilingual and later multicultural lines in the 1960s and 1970s, Creighton defended a British definition of Canada at the same time as he began to fear that he would be remembered only “as a pessimist, a bigot, and a violent Tory partisan.”

Through his virtuoso research into Creighton’s own voluminous papers, Wright paints a sensitive portrait of a brilliant but difficult man. Ultimately, *Donald Creighton* captures the twentieth-century transformation of English Canada through the life and times of one of its leading intellectuals.

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