

Primary Source

Earl of Selkirk to the Earl of
Liverpool--includes views on the events
of June 19th 1816 and more.

It will probably be in your Lordship's recollection that, in the year 1812, I communicated to you my intention of forming a Settlement at Red River, upon a tract of land, of which I had recently obtained a conveyance from the Hudson's Bay Company. I explained to your Lordship my general views of the manner in which that country might be colonised, and of the national benefits which might be expected to arise from the proposed Settlement. The observations which your Lordship then made upon the subject, gave me no reason to suppose that my intentions were, in any degree, inconsistent with the views of policy entertained by His Majesty's Government.

My intention of forming a Settlement at Red River, and the nature of my title to the land, was explained, about the same time, to the Secretary of State for the Colonial Department, and to the President of the Board of Trade, neither of whom expressed any objection to the measure. In the following year, when war had broken out with the United States; I applied to the Colonial Office to obtain from the Ordinance Department a supply of arms and ammunition, with a few light field pieces, for the defence of the Settlement. The readiness with which this was granted, led me still further to feel confident that my undertaking was not disapproved of. ...

It may be established by indisputable evidence, that the determination of the North-West Company to frustrate, at any expense, my attempt to form a settlement in the interior, was taken before the arrival of the first colonists in that country,--long before the date of those occurrences, which they now pretend to have been the original cause of all the disturbances and even before any of those alleged acts of mutual aggression, which have been so much dwelt upon, could possibly have occurred. Attempts have been made to excuse on the ground of retaliation, not only merely the robberies, but the murders, committed by the North-West Company, as being the errors and indiscretions of inconsiderate young men, acting under the impulse of irritation. Such men may, in many cases, have been put forward as the ostensible actors; but these crimes have been deliberately planned, directed and sanctioned by Partners of the Company, some of whom acted at the time as magistrates for the Indian territory--Is the

plea of retaliation to be admitted as a vindication for the conduct of men who thus take upon themselves systematically to avenge wrongs, for which the laws of their country would have afforded means of redress? ...

It appears, that the Colonial Department has been impressed with the notion, that all the violences committed at Red River, and in other parts of the interior, have arisen from contentions of commercial interest and mutual aggression between the contending parties.--Of these two parties, however, the one outnumbers the other in the proportion of three to one; and it would be extravagant to suppose, that a system of aggression would be adopted by the weaker party. Neither can it be supposed that men who entertained plans of lawless aggression, would have made anxious and repeated applications to His Majesty's Government for military protection. On the other hand, the objections made to that measure by the North-West Company, ought to have excited suspicion, when those who were known to possess a great superiority of force, thus appeared to dread the presence of the King's troops. The rejection of this request for military protection has been followed by scenes of outrage and bloodshed; but while upwards of forty lives have been lost, within the space of twelve months, on the side of those who had called for protection, one individual who has fallen on the other, --and that one engaged, at the time, in a premeditated attack upon the settlement.

Citation

[Peel 121](#): A letter to the Earl of Liverpool from the Earl of Selkirk: Accompanied by a correspondence with the Colonial Department (in the years 1817, 1818 and 1819) on the subject of the Red River settlement, in North America Author: Selkirk, Thomas Douglas 5th earl. Language: English London: Printed by J. Brettell, 1819
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