**Chapter Outline**

to accompany

*Indigenous Peoples within Canada: A Concise History*, Fifth Edition

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**Chapter 13: Time of Troubles**

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the short causes of the 1885 resistance and the immediate consequences it had for both First Nations and Métis peoples on the prairies. After 1870, many Métis families migrated west and north and established themselves along the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers on river lots similar to those they left along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. Unrest was brewing as they sought confirmation of title to lands, which were divided into ribbon lots. Due to the lack of formal Canadian government in the region at the time, they also sought to deal with the decline of buffalo through their own self-governing councils. Concurrently, the Nehiyawak were becoming disgruntled at what they saw as the non-fulfillment of treaty promises and key leaders such as Mistahimaskwa refused to sign treaties until they could get better terms. However, due to the loss of buffalo, they were forced to sign to try and avoid starvation for their people. Adding to the situation was concern about settler encroachment on Indigenous lands. After this time, the lack of treaty fulfillment continued to create disillusionment, and Indigenous Peoples in the West were becoming dissatisfied with their attempts at farming. As successive efforts failed, fear of starvation became real.

With the bison all but extinct by 1880, the Canadian prairies were a powder keg waiting to erupt as the Métis and Nehiyawak faced starvation with no buffalo and failing agricultural pursuits, all exacerbated by the non-fulfillment of treaty promises; perhaps most paramount for the Nehiyawak was the treaty provision of rations in times of famine. Rather than provide said rations, the Department of Indian Affairs implemented its “work for rations” program, requiring that people work to receive food. Even if a person was able-bodied and able to work, they only received 13 ounces of flour, 3 ounces of bacon and 6 ounces of beef in a day. This amount was later reduced even further, and mounting food shortages led to desperate measures such as killing the cattle provided to get them started as farmers and ranchers. The government appeared to recognize the growing potential for violence as they banned the sale of ammunition and ball cartridges to Indigenous Peoples of Manitoba and the North-West Territories by 1884, another contravention of treaties.

In 1884, Louis Riel returned to Canada and went to Batoche. He began lobbying Ottawa in writing to recognize Métis rights. By March 1885, Riel had announced his intention to establish a provisional government. In response, the Canadian government sent the Canadian militia west to take control of the situation. Adding stress to the situation was the decision by some of Mistahimaskwa’s followers to raid a storehouse holding food at Frog Lake, which resulted in the killing of nine; the dead were White missionaries, several settlers, and government officials. This was portrayed in eastern newspapers as a full-scale uprising.

As a result of the events of 1885, the immediate consequences for First Nations and the Métis were the imprisonment of a number of their leaders and accused participants, as well as the hanging of eight First Nations men for murder, and the well-publicized hanging of Louis Riel in November 1885. The long-term consequences for First Nations and Métis, respectively, were that the struggles for autonomy, self-government, and recognition as distinct peoples would be thwarted for some time.