



"From Racism to Redress: The Japanese Canadian Experience"

"No Chinaman, Japanese or Indian shall have his name placed on the Register of Voters for any Electoral District, or be entitled to vote at any election."

Provincial Elections Act of B.C., 1895.

In 1942, 23,000 Japanese Canadians lived on the West Coast of British Columbia. The majority of them were Canadians by birth or naturalized citizens. While they worked as fishermen and labourers and paid their taxes, they were denied the right to vote. Thirty-five years after the first person of Japanese origin settled in Canada (Manzo Nagano), Japanese Canadians continued to face persecution and racism.

At the turn of the century, anti-Asian sentiment was rampant. Successive waves of Asian immigration gave rise to a public anxiety over the "Yellow Peril". It reached a fevered pitch in 1907 when a crowd at an anti-Asian rally suddenly turned into a mob and marched through Vancouver's Chinatown and Japanese town breaking store windows. The riot was stirred by the consolidation of anti-Asian agitation by industrialist workers and exploitation of the public sentiment, by the media and politicians. The government reacted by restricting immigration of Japanese nationals to Canada from 400 in 1908 to 150 in 1923.

Despite the racism, the community continued to develop and prosper. During the years of limited immigration, women arrived and families began to grow. Japanese Canadians, still without the franchise, volunteered for service in WWI. By 1919, Japanese Canadians owned nearly half the fishing licenses in B.C., but by 1925, 1,000 fishing licenses were stripped from them. In 1941, Japanese Canadians were fingerprinted and photographed and were required to carry registration cards. War was imminent.

The Outbreak of War: Enemy Alien Legislation

"On December 7, 1941, an event took place that had nothing to do with me or my family and yet which had devastating consequences for all of us - Japan bombed Pearl Harbour in a surprise attack. With that event began one of the shoddiest chapters in the tortuous history of democracy in North America."

Dr. David Suzuki, *Metamorphosis: Stages in a Life*.

Immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, 1,800 Japanese Canadian fishing boats were seized and impounded. Japanese language newspapers were shut down. The government enacted the War Measures Act and vested power from the representative Parliament to the Prime Minister's Cabinet. Within three months, federal Cabinet Orders-in-Council forced the removal of Japanese Canadian male nationals to camps, and then authorized the removal of all persons of Japanese origin. The RCMP was given expanded powers to search without warrant, impose a curfew and confiscate property. A Custodian of Enemy Property was authorized to hold all land and property in trust.

During the "evacuation", many people were given only 24 hours notice to vacate their homes, before being sent to "clearing sites" where they were detained until internment camps were prepared. A civilian body, the B.C. Security Commission was in charge of the expulsion orders. By November 1942, after eight months of operation, the Commission managed to breakup and up-root families and sent nearly 22,000 individuals to road camps, internment camps and prisoner of war camps.

Stripped of their rights, categorized as "Enemy Aliens" and forcibly uprooted, Japanese Canadian internees faced further injustices. All of their property and belongings held by the Custodian of Enemy Property "in trust", were sold without owners' consent. Land, businesses, cars, houses, and personal effects were liquidated at a fraction of their value. The government justified this action. Proceeds from the sale of goods and property would be used to pay for the living expenses of the interned. Towards the end of the war, the Japanese were threatened with further expulsion. They were given the option for "dispersal" to places and towns east of the Rocky Mountains, or outright "repatriation" to Japan.

The End of War: Government Anti-Japanese Sentiments Persist

"Let our slogan be for British Columbia: 'No Japs from the Rockies to the seas'"

Ian Alistair Mackenzie, MP, from his nomination speech, September 1944.

The War ended in 1945 after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrendered. While Japanese Americans pieced their lives together and returned to the coast, Japanese Canadians did not have this option. Their choice was to be exiled to Japan, a defeated country unknown to many Japanese Canadians, or to re-settle in foreign parts of Canada. Initially, 10,000 Japanese Canadians signed for repatriation. Many signed out of fear, or misguided loyalty to Canada.

Throughout the years Japanese Canadians fought for the franchise, protested against restricted immigration and opposed internment. As the war ceased, Japanese Canadians were no longer alone. Others joined the fight. The Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians, a federation of organizations including church groups, civil libertarians and journalists, brought the case against deportation to the Supreme Court of Canada. While the Supreme Court ruled in favour of deportation, Prime Minister King decided to yield to public opinion and end the program. By this time in 1947, 4,000 Japanese Canadians had left Canada; 2,000 were Canadian born, of whom one third were children under the age of sixteen.

On March 1949, four years after the war was over, the last of the wartime restrictions and the War Measures Act were lifted. Japanese Canadians were allowed to travel freely and return to the West Coast. Prior to this date, in 1948, Japanese Canadians received the right to vote. Public sentiment was beginning to lean in the community's favour. Japanese Canadians were gaining strength and resolve to mobilize politically.

Seeking Justice: The Movement for Redress and Compensation

"Born in Canada, brought up on big-band jazz, Fred Astaire and the novels of Rider Haggard, I had perceived myself to be as Canadian as the beaver. I hated rice. I had committed no crime. I was never charged, tried or convicted of anything. Yet I was fingerprinted and interned."

Ken Adachi, Toronto Star, Sept. 24, 1988.

One of the government's first overtures towards redress was to compensate the Japanese Canadians for their losses during the war. The Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy (JCCD), which later became the National Association of Japanese Canadians, objected to the terms of the Bird Commission. Compensation was limited to property losses only. This was too restrictive and did not deal with issues of civil rights, sale of property without consent, and damages incurred from loss earnings, disruption to education, and psychological trauma.

In 1950, the Justice Henry Bird recommended \$1.2 million compensation to individuals - from which their legal fees had to be deducted. This represented \$52 a person. Many felt compelled to accept the offer; others did not even file claims. The outcome of this commission quelled any further protest for the next 20 years.

In the 1970's the government allowed public access to government files. It became possible for the public to review the government's wartime actions. In her research "The Politics of Racism", historian Ann Sunahara revealed what many in the Japanese Canadian community had felt all along - the Japanese in Canada were never a threat to national security. This fact was confirmed by military and RCMP documents. Rather, the government's wartime actions were spurred on by the anti-Asian, and racist sentiments of the time. The war provided the government with the opportunity to use political means to respond to the "Japanese" problem. The wrongs of the past were being exposed. History was about to be re-written.

The Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement

"Canadians of every background are supporting the National Association of Japanese Canadians' demand for redress as a necessary journey into the interior of our national conscience. Acknowledgment of an imperfect past is a prerequisite for a future in which people live together in mutual respect, and self-righteous racism does not take us by surprise again.

Bruce McLeod, former Moderator of the United Church of Canada, 1988.

The 1980's marked a period of rejuvenation for the fight for redress. The Japanese Canadian community initiated a process that would see them deal with internal community struggles of leadership, the mobilization of the community around a compensation package, and getting the government to the table. Towards the end, they would gain the support of many Canadians from all walks of life, from across Canada.

The campaign for redress was bolstered by a number of events. In 1980, the US Congress conducted hearings into the internment of Japanese Americans. One year before the Canadian agreement, the U.S. offered an apology and individual compensation package to the internees. Both events drew media attention to the cause and highlighted the case for Japanese Canadians. The all-party Committee report *Equality Now!*, released in 1984, raised the public consciousness to the issue of redress. This initiated a government response. The NAJC spent countless hours negotiating with the government. The discussions spanned five years with two different government parties in power and five successive Ministers of State for Multiculturalism.

On September 22, 1988 The Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement was signed. In the House of Commons, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney acknowledged the government's wrongful actions; pledged to ensure that the events would never recur and recognized the loyalty of the Japanese Canadians to Canada. As a symbolic redress for those injustices the government offered individual and community compensation to the Japanese Canadians. To the Canadian people, and on behalf of Japanese Canadians, the government committed to create a national organization that would foster racial harmony and help to eliminate racism. The Canadian Race Relation Foundation opened its doors in 1997.

Lessons Learned from History: Can it Happen Again?

"History is repeating itself. Buck-teeth-grinning wartime posters have been dusted off, warning that the yellow menace is invading America and winning. Daily, the growing animosity to the land of the rising sun, and to me, fills me with fear and apprehension. I stand helpless as the continent's racism is being manipulated to explain unemployment, deficits, and increasing non-competitiveness. Scapegoat as enemy, my chest constricts again." Maryka Omatsu (Judge), *Bittersweet Passage*, 1992.

In 1942, the Canadian government enacted the War Measures Act. Orders in Council decreed by Cabinet gave sweeping powers to the RCMP and military to search, arrest and curfew. Civil Liberties were cast aside for national security. Japanese Canadians were registered and interned.

To prevent history from repeating itself, the NAJC lobbied for amendments to the War Measures Act and in 1987, the government replaced it with the Emergencies Act. The new Act outlined criteria for what is considered a national emergency; provided Parliamentary oversight of Cabinet Orders in Council; and prohibited the detention of individuals on the basis of race and other grounds, e.g. religion, etc. It attempted to balance the protection of civil liberties with the right to respond to emergencies.

But does it? Although the Emergencies Act contains provisions to apply the Charter of Rights and Freedoms during the exercise of emergency powers "in the same way as it does other government actions"; this alone is not an unequivocal guarantee of Charter rights. Critics' fear that in upholding the Emergencies Act the federal government can use certain provisions of the Constitution ("Peace, Order and Good Government") and the Charter (s.33) to override fundamental Charter Rights. The greatest fear lies in the fact that the Charter needs to be amended to ensure that human rights cannot be eroded, even in times of emergency.

It was racism and wartime hysteria, which allowed the government to intern Japanese Canadian citizens. The War Measures Act was simply the mechanism used to carry out the government's orders. Thus, the Emergency Act alone may not be enough to secure the rights of vulnerable groups.

ANTI-JAPANESE LEGISLATION

B.C. Elections Act.

1897 British Columbia denies the franchise to citizens of "Asiatic" origin.

Hayashi-Lemieux "Gentleman's Agreement".

1908 Japan agrees to restrict the number of passports issued to male labourers and domestic servants to a maximum of 400 a year.

1923 The number of passports is restricted to Japanese male immigrants to 150 a year

1928 Wives and children are now included in the 150 a year quota.

Orders-in Council.

P.C 117: March 1941.

- Required registration and fingerprinting of all Japanese Canadians over the age of 16.

P.C. 365: January 1941.

- Required all male Japanese Canadian nationals between the ages of 18-45 to be removed from the protected land - 100 miles inland.

P.C. 1486: February 1941.

- Required removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from protected area.

P.C. 469: January 1943.

- Authorized the Custodian of Enemy Property to sell property of Japanese Canadians that was being held in trust.

P.C. 496: February 1943.

- Required that Japanese Canadians had to apply for a license to purchase property.

P.C. 469: April 1943.

- Ordered the deportation of Japanese Canadians to Japan or their removal to eastern Canada.

FACTS & FIGURES :

- Prior to World War II, 22,096 Japanese Canadians lived in British Columbia; three quarters of them were naturalized or native born Canadians. During the war, 21,460 were forcibly removed from their homes; families were broken up and sent to internment camps. After the war, 3,964 were deported to Japan; one third of them were Canadian citizens.
- In 1950, the Bird Commission's report resulted in an offer of \$ 1.2 million compensation to Japanese Canadians. A 1987 Price Waterhouse study estimated real property loss at \$ 50 million, total economic loss at \$ 443 million.
- The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canadian military advisers did not consider the Japanese Canadian community on the West Coast as a threat to domestic security.

- The Japanese in Canada were treated harsher than the Japanese in the United States.
- In the U.S., families were interned together. In Canada, initially, families were separated.
- In the U.S., constitutional protections forbade the sale of property. In Canada, the government seized and sold land and personal property. In the U.S., housing and food were provided. In Canada, internees paid for food, clothes and basic improvements in housing from savings and proceeds of property sales.
- In the U.S., the government moved quickly in 1944-45 to rescind exclusion orders and to allow the return of citizens to the West Coast. In Canada, Japanese Canadians were forced to decide on deportation to Japan or relocation to parts east of the Rockies.
- The 10 internment camps, 3 road camps, 2 prisoner of war camps, and 5 self-supporting camps were scattered throughout Canada. During the war years, Japanese Canadians were regarded as possible threats to Canada's domestic security. Their actions were monitored; their rights suspended. Yet no hearings or trials were ever held and no charges of treason were ever laid.

QUOTES:

Roy Ito, *We Went to War. The Story of Japanese Canadians Who Served During the First and Second World Wars*. 1984.

"The deep rooted fear and hatred of the Japanese that went back for half a century had climaxed in a manner that was perhaps inevitable. The animosity had been nurtured by many men, twisting facts and playing upon racial prejudice until the people of British Columbia perceived the distortions as the truth."

Angus MacInnes, member of Parliament from British Columbia, 1943.

"I see no reason why we should deal with the population of Japanese origin among us any differently from the way in which we deal with those of German and Italian extraction. If we deal with them differently - and we have done so - we do it an account of racial prejudice."

Prime Minister Mackenzie King, House of Commons, 1944.

"The sound policy and the best policy for the Japanese Canadians themselves is to distribute widely as possible throughout the country where they will not create feelings of racial hostility."

Kitagawa, Muriel. Letter to the Custodian of Enemy Property, 1943

"You, who deal in lifeless figures, files, and statistics could never measure the depth of hurt and outrage dealt out to those of us who love this land. It is because we are Canadians, that we protest the violation of our birthright."

Kogawa, Joy. *Naomi's Road*, 1986

"Every morning I wake up in a narrow bunk bed by the stove. I wish and wish we could go home. I don't want to be in this house of the bears with newspaper walls. I want to be with Mommy and Daddy and my doll in our real house. I want to be in my own room where the picture bird sings above my head....But no matter how hard I wish, we don't go home."

Thomas Reid, Member of Parliament for New Westminster, January 15, 1942

"Take them back to Japan. They do not belong here, and here, and there is only one solution to the problem. They cannot be assimilated as Canadians for no matter how long the Japanese remain in Canada they will always be Japanese."

Takashima, Shizuye. *A Child in a Prison Camp*, 1971

"I have to pay taxes, but have never been allowed to vote. Even now, they took our land, our houses, our children, everything. We are their enemies."

Japanese Canadian Centennial Project, 1978.

"Let us break this self-damaging silence and own our own history. If we do not, estrangement from our past will be absorbed and driven deeper, surfacing as a fragmentation in ourselves and coming generations."

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

Books:

- Adachi, Ken. A History of the Japanese Canadians: The Enemy that Never Was. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1976.
- Japanese Canadian Centennial Project Committee. A Dream of Riches. The Japanese Canadians, 1877-1977. Vancouver: JCCP, 1978.
- Kobayashi, Audrey. The Japanese-Canadian Redress Settlement and its Implications for 'Race Relations'. Canadian Ethnic Studies, XXIV, No.1, 1992
- Kogawa, Joy. Obasan. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1981.
- Kitigawa, Muriel. This is My Own: Letters to Wes & Other Writings on Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985.
- Miki, Roy & Kobayashi, Cassandra. Justice in our Time: The Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991.
- National Association of Japanese Canadians. Economic Losses of Japanese Canadians after 1941. Winnipeg: Hignell Printing, 1985.
- Oiwa, Keibo. Stone Voices: Wartime Writings of Japanese Canadian Issei. Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1991.
- Omatsu, Maryka. Bittersweet Passage. Redress and the Japanese Canadian Experience. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992.
- Sunahara, Ann Gomer. The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. Toronto: Lorimer, 1981.

Videos:

- Fukushima, Michael. Minoru: Memory of Exile. National Film Board of Canada, 1993.
- Jones, Dallas & Shelly, Leon C. (producers), Of Japanese Descent. National Film Board of Canada, 1945.
- Lerman, Jeanette (director) & Koenig, Wolf (producer). Enemy Alien. National Film Board of Canada, 1975.

Websites:

<http://www.najc.ca>

The National Association of Japanese Canadians

<http://www.jcnm.ca/Home.htm>

Japanese Canadian National Museum in November 1999

<http://www.crr.ca>

Canadian Race Relations Foundation

http://www.csuohio.edu/art_photos/canada/canada.html

Canadian Concentration Camps

<http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/Canada/internment/intro.html>

Japanese Canadian Internment - Information at the University of Washington

<http://www.momomedia.com/CLPEF/>

Civil Liberties Public Education Fund