

CHALLENGING RACIST “BRITISH COLUMBIA”

..

150 YEARS AND COUNTING



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COVER Design by John Endo Greenaway. Painting: *Flight Through the Four Winds* by Master Carver Sanford Williams. 2017. 21 x 26 inches (53 cm x 66 cm). Landscape Photo: Creative Commons license: Migjohanson

THE ARTISTS

Ahtsik-sta Qwayachiik (Sanford Williams)

This master carver was born and raised in the village of Yuquot, Nootka Island, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. *Yuquot* is the Nuuchah-nulth word for “Where the winds blow in all directions”. After surviving residential school, Sanford Williams attended the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art at ‘Ksan in Old Hazelton, BC. Since completing the course in 1988, Ahtsik-sta Qwayachiik (Sanford Williams) has worked independently as a Master Carver – every single day. See his website at www.sanfordwilliams.com.

John Endo Greenaway

I was honoured to incorporate Sanford Williams’ powerful image into the cover design. With this resource rooted so much in the land and the water, it seemed fitting to have Williams’ *Flight Through the Four Winds* rising above the Cascade mountain range with one of Manning Park’s Lightning Lakes visible in the foreground. I was drawn to this particular photo due to the layered affect created by the mountainous terrain, reminding me of the many overlapping layers of history contained in these pages.

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Asian Canadians on Vancouver Island: Race, Indigeneity, and the Transpacific
and
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challengeracistbc.ca

*Our work and offices are located on the unceded,
traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific Northwest*

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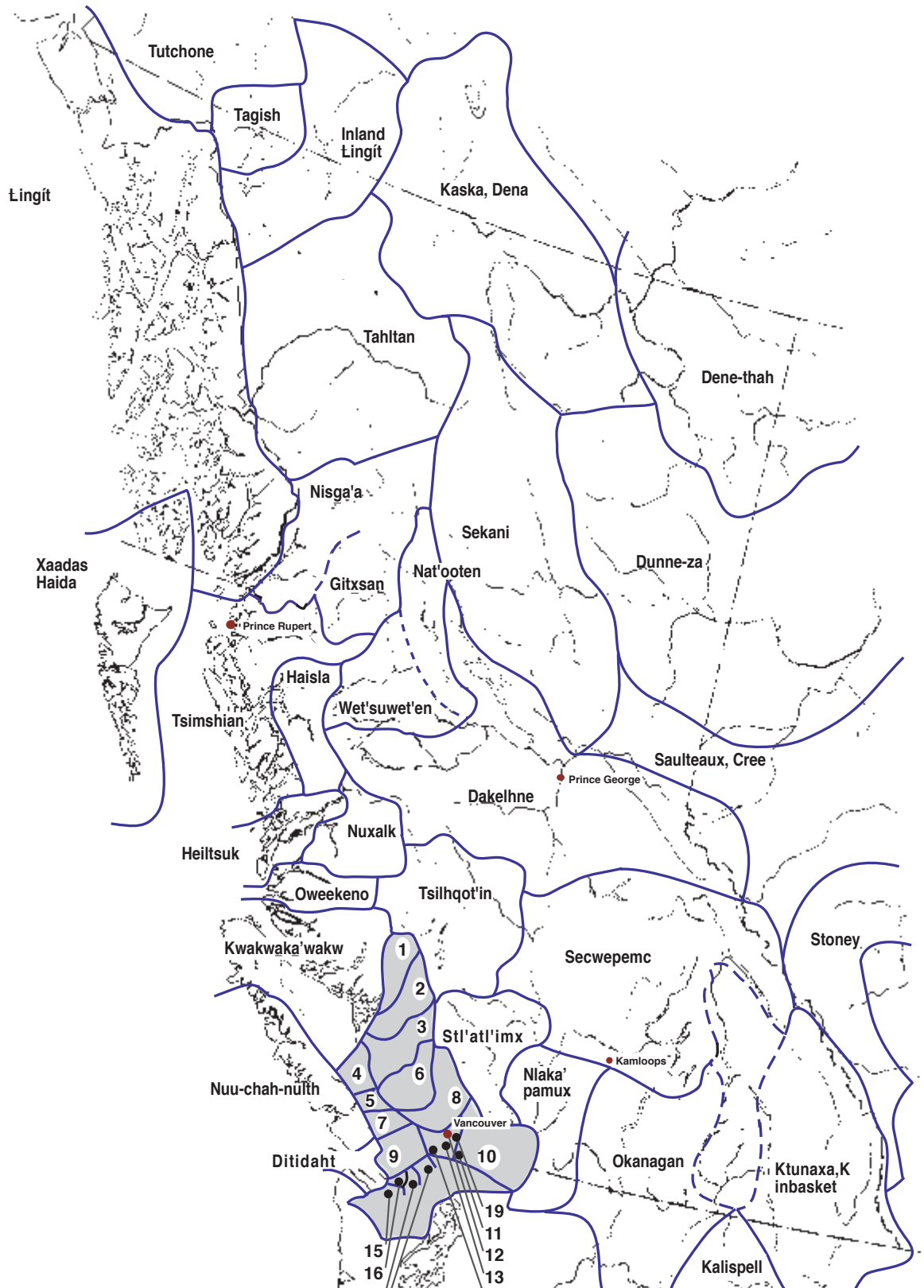
This work is available as a PDF version on our website challengeracistbc.ca

An enhanced digital version and accompanying video content will also be released on our website in the spring of 2021.

FIRST NATIONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

©1994 UBC Museum of Anthropology.

The intent is to provide a more accurate representation of First Nations in British Columbia. Boundaries shown are language areas and not an authoritative depiction of tribal territories. Terms and spellings do not reflect all dialects or names used by First Nations living within the illustrated regions. For spelling of territories and places in Indigenous languages see First Peoples' Cultural Council maps at maps.fpcc.ca.



A PROVINCE LIKE NO OTHER

In 1871, this province joined the Canadian federation and, ever since, communities of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized peoples have waged protracted struggles against the dispossession of Indigenous lands, institutionalized discrimination, and the politics of exclusion. They have won many victories yet, 150 years later, we are witnessing yet another uprising against systemic racism.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the smoke-filled skies of a climate emergency reflect a deepening crisis out of which has arisen an anti-racist uprising that is both local and global. The Black Lives Matter movement that erupted after the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Chantel Moore and many others reflects increasing frustration with and renewed determination to stamp out systemic racism, including the police violence that is a perennial part of it. The movement against COVID-19-related racism has brought to the fore young activists organizing to stop Sinophobic attacks and hate crimes targeting Indigenous or Asian peoples who appear “Chinese”. No longer are they willing to tolerate the treatment of non-whites as perpetual foreigners. Failure to address Indigenous concerns regarding COVID-19, or to consider and address the disproportionate and intersectional effects on racialized communities, are also forms of racism. The Wet’suwet’en actions to assert title over their traditional territories and stop the Coastal Gaslink (CGL) pipeline and the pan-Canadian outrage at widespread police violence that ensued represent a central point in the uprising against racism. It is only the latest chapter in a long history of Indigenous resistance to the continuing, violent dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the environmental racism that has accompanied dispossession in this province.

This upsurge, involving so many young people, is not an accident. It reflects a new generation’s changing values in a province where systemic racism remains widespread. How did this situation arise? We believe part of the answer lies in the failure of the province to fully recognize or appropriately address its history – the racism associated with settler colonialism and white supremacy. In this resource we approach that history critically, with a special focus on how racialized groups, each in their own way, fought for justice and continue to do so in a province that, it turns out, is like no other.

A BRITISH COLONIAL PROJECT

This province’s origins as a separate British colony located on the Pacific resulted in a white minority negotiating unique Terms of Union with Canada in 1871. This often led to jurisdictional disputes with the federal government but, in the end, Ottawa capitulated, allowing a white minority here to impose what we call the Pacific politics of white supremacy. This resulted in:

- a particularly acute form of Indigenous dispossession amounting to genocide;
- everyday racism and policies that demolished and dispersed Black communities;
- voting laws disenfranchising Indigenous peoples and Asians in a manner that echoed the era of US slavery;
- anti-Asian immigration laws that allowed a white minority to become the majority; and
- the attempted ethnic cleansing of Japanese Canadians from the province.

This assessment goes to the heart of the province’s history of racism and is based on the lived experiences of racialized peoples and their ongoing struggles to survive and surmount systemic racism, past and present. In telling stories from diverse communities, with full references and supplementary community links, this resource strives to fulfill the call of the United Nations to get at the “deep roots of the history, culture and mentality of racism and discrimination”¹ in “British Columbia.” We put that name in quotation marks and ask you to join us in questioning its origins and probing its past – does the term “British Columbia,” named after a colonizing empire and Christopher Columbus, not embody and project the history of racism in this province?

A Caution: In describing the historical dynamics of the past 150 years, we use racial categories that may mask the huge diversity within groups or communities. In following the seam of resistance to racism we are being selective in the stories we choose. Not every story can be told, nor every group represented. We hope this publication will facilitate the telling of a broader group of stories and will be a step in the development of inclusive, intersectional analyses to support decolonization.

¹ The Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights called for this in their report on Canada in 2004. See Report by Mr. Doudou Diène, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, “Addendum: Mission to Canada, 2004,” accessed October 2, 2020, bit.ly/3pwDDTO



RCMP officers, many with military-style tactical uniforms and carrying semi-automatic rifles, forcefully entered sovereign, unceded Wet'suwet'en territory, arresting several Wet'suwet'en land defenders in the process in January 2019. A similar raid took place again in February 2020 sparking a pan-Canadian, anti-racist uprising to defend the Wet'suwet'en lands. Amber Bracken for *The New York Times*.

“BRITISH COLUMBIA”? AN ANTI-RACIST UPRISING

INTRODUCTION

Just days after George Floyd was killed by a Minneapolis police officer kneeling on his neck, hundreds of thousands of protestors in both the US and Canada took to the streets to demand an end to a long history of racial profiling, brutality, and killing of racialized individuals by police in both countries. The murder of Floyd on May 25, 2020 and frequent instances of police violence towards Black and Indigenous individuals over subsequent weeks in the US and around the world, including Canada, re-emboldened an ongoing social movement, Black Lives Matter.

The Black Lives Matter movement is symbolic of the inextricable links between the colonial histories of white supremacy in Canada and the US, the endurance of systemic anti-Black racism today, and the struggles of Indigenous peoples across the continent. One central demand of the movement is for the “defundment,” disarmament, and demilitarization of police forces that continue to enact violence against racialized individuals and communities and criminalize their systemic poverty. The movement advocates that the



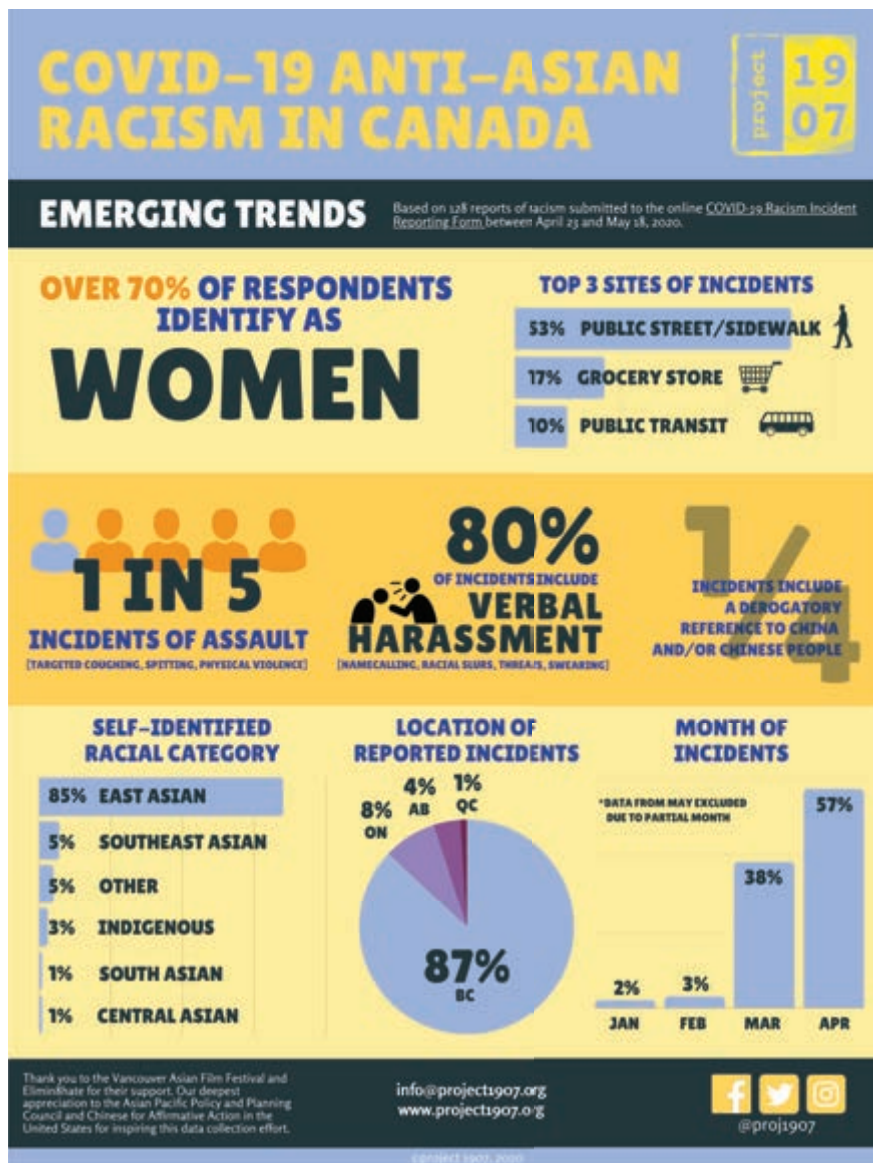
Top photo: Kathleen Martens, APTN News.

Bottom Photo: A Black Lives Matter protest taking place at the Vancouver Art Gallery on 31 May 2020. Creative Commons (CC) License by GoToVan.

millions poured into police forces daily be reallocated towards measures that will heal and support racialized and oppressed communities, such as for housing, employment, social programs, and emergency mental health care. Moreover, the movement reinforces the longstanding struggles of local organizations such as the BC Black History Awareness Society and the Hogan's Alley Society to influence the BC government to ensure the narratives of Black people, their contributions and achievements, and their fight against racism and discrimination as an integral part of the collective history of this province, are included in the K-12 curriculum.

As the number of countries reporting cases of COVID-19 increased in the spring of 2020, anti-Asian racism around the world became increasingly overt, prompting a global and local anti-racist movement against COVID-19-related anti-Asian racism. This included in BC, where there was a surge in violent incidents and hate crimes directed towards individuals who appeared to be of Asian descent. Of course, reported cases barely scratch the surface of the microaggressions, hostile attitudes, and overtly racist comments that Asian communities have been subjected to during an already frightening and stressful time.

Again, with young activists taking the lead, organizations such as Vancouver's project 1907, Vancouver Asian Film Festival (VAFF), hua Foundation, Bảo Vệ Collective, Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC, and Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, working with their allies across Canada and globally, developed an intensive campaign taking aim at anti-Black racism as well as the racism directed at Asian Canadian communities. Activists organized their own online reporting system, called Fight COVID Racism. They have since recorded hundreds of incidents. The movement for race-related data collection, including for disaggregated health data on which groups have been most affected by the COVID-19 virus, has prompted the BC Human Rights Commission to recommend reform of data collection processes.¹ A "colour-blind" approach is no longer acceptable.



Project 1907 is a grassroots group of Asian women who worked in a cross-Canada coalition to document anti-Asian racism. Poster www.project1907.org/reportingcentre.

Earlier in the year, the hereditary chiefs of all five clans of the Wet'suwet'en nation continued their prolonged fight for control of the *yintah* (homelands) and opposition to CGL's efforts to build a pipeline for fracked gas over their territory. Heavily armed with rifles, police dogs, and helicopters, the RCMP assaulted Wet'suwet'en checkpoints, arresting many Wet'suwet'en land defenders, as well as journalists attempting to document the raids. A repeat of a raid in 2019, this time the incursion sparked a provincial and countrywide campaign for Indigenous rights and against state violence. Allies organized massive protests, sit-ins, and blockades of critical rail lines and bridges that politicians could not ignore. The movement shut down the railway system of the country for two weeks, an unprecedented example of solidarity. The Wet'suwet'en campaign derailed the



Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs lead the struggle to stop the Coastal GasLink pipeline and defend their traditional territory. Photo courtesy Unist'ot'en Camp.

provincial and federal governments' ongoing rush to exploit fossil fuels on Indigenous territories.

Coercion ramped up a year earlier, in 2018 when CGL applied for and received an injunction prohibiting Wet'suwet'en checkpoints and encampments erected to hinder the construction of the pipeline along the company's desired route, which the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) enforced. The corporation and governments failed to respect the 1997 Supreme Court of Canada ruling that affirmed the authority that hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en nation held

over their traditional territory as articulated in the landmark *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* ruling.² In ignoring the hereditary chiefs and reaching out solely to elected band chief and councils, the corporations and government sowed further division among First Nations.

This nationwide solidarity movement is about more than just a pipeline – it is only the latest in longstanding attempts by Indigenous Nations to assert sovereignty over their traditional territories. As we explain, the ongoing Indigenous quest for land justice lays bare the racist foundations upon which this province has been built.

¹ British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, *Disaggregated Demographic Data Collection in British Columbia: The Grandmother Perspective* (Vancouver: BCOHRC, 2020), accessed December 14, 2020, bit.ly/2WS2rbV

² *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, [1997] 3 SCR 1010, accessed December 14, 2020, bit.ly/34Vkp1r

First Peoples' Language Map of British Columbia

"Language is at the core of our identity as people, members of a family, and nations; it provides the underpinnings of our relationship to culture, the land, spirituality, and the intellectual life of a nation."



FIRST PEOPLES'
CULTURAL COUNCIL

The First Peoples' Language Map of British Columbia was provided by the First Peoples' Cultural Council, a provincial Crown corporation dedicated to the revitalization of B.C.'s First Nations languages, arts, cultures and heritage. For more information, visit: www.fpcc.ca.

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“BRITISH COLUMBIA”? INDIGENOUS PEOPLES CONFRONT GENOCIDE

Recent Wet’suwet’en land defence is about responsibilities and rights to the land and water. It is also about a land tenure system fundamentally structured by racism articulated as the historical dispossession of Indigenous peoples throughout the region. It is time for the province to address this issue publicly and make restitution.

Indigenous peoples have lived on the Northwest Coast since the beginning of time. Historically, they thrived on these vast and abundant territories largely because of offerings given to human people from the lands and seas, including the salmon, which provided a form of nourishment necessary to sustain a prosperous and flourishing population. These relationships to lands and waters are bound to the laws and legal traditions of governing Indigenous societies. They are remembered, preserved, and transmitted through the intricate and sophisticated oral traditions of the numerous Indigenous groups who have protected and lived as one with these lands and waters since time immemorial.

Indigenous nations developed sophisticated governance, social, and economic systems throughout their territories, such as cultivating clam gardens, nurturing camas crops, and developing reef-net fishing that allowed them to live in reciprocal relationships with the lands and seas that sustained their lifeways. The establishment of these sophisticated systems facilitated nation-to-nation diplomacy and thus the establishment of trade routes throughout the vast regions, including passages from present-day Alaska to the Columbia River. These governance, social, and economic systems remain central to the prosperity of Indigenous nationhood presently. As Nuuchahnulth Hereditary Chief Umeek E. Richard Atleo explains, “For millennia the principles presented in origin stories were verified through the practice of *oosumich* and applied

in daily life and ceremonial potlatches, resulting in societies that managed, for the most part, to balance the rights of individuals and groups as well as the rights of humans and the other life forms.”¹

EMPIRE AND RACISM

For more than 500 years, Europeans have sought to conquer the world. Armed with Christian notions of racial superiority, the British, French, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese brought their prejudices with them as they sought global commercial and strategic advantage in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Explorers such as Captains James Cook and George Vancouver believed they had the right to claim, in the name of the Christian empire, any area of the world. This belief was based on the Doctrine of Discovery, a racist theory asserting that if Europeans went any place in the world inhabited by non-whites and non-Christians, they had “discovered” it and had the right to claim that territory. Often, they erroneously labelled Indigenous peoples as “nomads” incapable of governing the lands, waters, and people.²



On Vancouver Island, for example, the Spanish and British clashed for control in the 1789-90 “Nootka Crisis” – both claiming sovereignty over the lands occupied by the Mowachaht and other Nuuchahnulth peoples. The clash between the two imperial powers ended in a stalemate and the Mowachaht people rightfully returned to Yuquot (Friendly Cove), their traditional home for thousands of years.³

The Mowachaht had at first welcomed the newcomers, hoping to gain access to new products through trade. Comekela, a Mowachaht Chief, boarded a trading vessel returning to Macau in 1787 and stayed in China for nearly a year.⁴ Dozens of Chinese workers came to Yuquot

Illustration: Chief Maquinna welcomed but also resisted European incursions. Royal BC Museum and Archives, A-02678.



For hundreds of years, the British Empire expanded based on the Doctrine of Discovery, a racist theory asserting that any place a British representative travelled to that was governed by non-whites could nonetheless be claimed and occupied by British people. The British used this to colonize vast regions of virtually every continent. "The World Showing British Empire in Red (1922)" by Eric Fischer. Licensed with CC BY 2.0.

(Friendly Cove) as part of early British fur-trading missions out of China. However, the European crews' colonial and ethnocentric attitudes of superiority soon led to frictions. Increasing Indigenous resistance led to violent clashes – Robert Gray, master of the *Columbia*, attacked and killed dozens of people and ordered the bombing and destruction of the village of Opitsaht in 1792. Led by Chief Maquinna, the Mowachaht and their allies attacked and captured the US trading ship *Boston* in 1803, killing most of the crew.⁵ Diseases brought from Europe, however, decimated Indigenous communities, with many losing up to 90 percent of their pre-contact community members. Colonialism put Indigenous peoples in impossible situations and survival demanded at times accommodation with new, powerful forces. Protest took many forms, and it is that seam that we follow to understand the long history of resistance and resurgence that has brought us to where we are today.

INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE TO EARLY COLONIALISM

Despite such violence and loss of human life, Indigenous peoples remained determined to defend their lands and continuously challenged the violent expressions of colonial expansion. However, in 1846 the US and British governments negotiated the Oregon Treaty, creating new and fundamental problems for Indigenous peoples.



Contemporary reef-net fishing on WSÁNEĆ waters. The fishery has always been integral to many aspects of WSÁNEĆ society, yet the practice was banned by the colonial government a century ago. University of Victoria Communications.

THE OREGON TREATY: SETTLER SOVEREIGNTY OR COLONIALISM?

The Oregon Treaty (officially the Treaty of Washington), negotiated by the US and British governments in 1846, is today seen by Canadian courts as the legal basis for Crown or settler sovereignty over “British Columbia.”⁶ At the time, the British and US governments both claimed they had the right to expand their borders to include the “Oregon Territories” or the whole of the Pacific Northwest, dividing the land along the 49th parallel into what became “British Columbia” to the north and the states of Washington and Oregon to the south. As the Assembly of First Nations and others have clarified, however, the assertion of British sovereignty over these Indigenous territories was historically, and remains presently, based on the discredited and racist Doctrine of Discovery.

According to this doctrine, the Spanish pointed to Christopher Columbus as their basis for claiming the Americas. In the 1846 negotiations with the US government, the British pointed to James Cook, George Vancouver, Alexander Mackenzie, and David Thompson as their “discoverers” of “British Columbia.” Given that 100,000 or more Indigenous peoples were living in the region, to suggest that it had been “discovered” by British explorers was, and is, ridiculous. Nor did the British even bother to consult the Indigenous peoples who they knew lived and claimed the land as theirs. This erasure of Indigenous peoples is how the Doctrine of Discovery was applied in practice. In continuing to rely on this treaty, are Canadian courts and governments not reproducing colonialism today?



Kmusser, CC BY-SA 2.5, via Wikimedia

Set at the 49th parallel, the new border arbitrarily cut through numerous Indigenous territories, including Nuu-chah-nulth, WSÁNEĆ, Lekwungen, and many others. Indigenous nations throughout these vast border regions have always opposed and resisted the imposition and burden of this artificial boundary, which continues to severely disrupt the political, legal, economic, and cultural governing autonomy and continuity of these Indigenous nations.



■ Dave Elliott Sr

The late Dave Elliott Sr., WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) Elder, recalled: “It was 1846 when they divided up the country and made the United States and Canada. We lost our land and our fishing grounds. It very nearly destroyed us; all of a sudden, we became poor people. Our people were rich once because we had everything. We had all those runs of salmon and that beautiful way of fishing. When they divided up the country, we lost most of our territory. It is now in the State of Washington. They said we would be able to go back and forth when they laid down the boundary, they said it wouldn’t make any difference to the Indians. They said that it wouldn’t affect us Indians. They didn’t keep that promise very long; Washington made laws over our Federal laws, British Columbia made laws over those Federal laws too, and pretty soon we weren’t able to go there and fish. Some of our people were arrested for going over there.”⁷

Photo from Saltwater People, Native Education, School District 63 (Saanich).

Predicting that they might lose control of the territory south of the border, the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) in 1843 built a fort on Songhees lands that would eventually become Victoria. This marked the transition from the fur trade era to that of settler colonialism. James Douglas, the governor of Vancouver Island at the time, signed 14 agreements with First Nations (often termed the Douglas “Treaties”) in order to secure land for settlers, but any such attempt at negotiated agreements ended in 1854.

The Douglas ‘Treaties’

The Douglas Treaties are a series of 14 agreements negotiated between 1850 and 1854 that exist in both written and oral form. Drawing on the examples of the 1852 North and South Saanich Treaties, the complexities of these treaties become clear.⁸ From the perspective of James Douglas and Hudson Bay Company officials, the approximately 200-word written version of the treaties secured settler land ownership over the territories and prevented war with the W̱SÁNEĆ. From the W̱SÁNEĆ perspective, these meetings mostly served to settle isolated clashes between Indigenous and settler peoples.⁹ Further, given the vast linguistic, cultural, and contextual nuances, it is understood that W̱SÁNEĆ leaders could not have surrendered land ownership, as this concept did not exist in mid-nineteenth century W̱SÁNEĆ cultural, political, and legal frameworks.¹⁰ Between 1850 and 1854 (see map), twelve other similar treaties were signed on Vancouver Island, but such agreements represent less than one percent of the province’s land base.



Douglas Treaties. timescolonist.com.

► PRIMARY SOURCE W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council, “The Douglas Treaties,” wsanec.com/the-douglas-treaties

The British empire established the colonies of Vancouver Island (1849) and British Columbia (1858) and then merged the two into “British Columbia” in 1866. The Gold Rush of 1858 brought many newcomers to the territory, particularly from the United States.¹¹ The miners’ incursions into the interior of the province resulted in serious confrontations as Indigenous people pushed back. At the same time, James Douglas issued a special invitation to the Black community in San Francisco to come and settle (see next section).

After Douglas, however, the colony aimed to bring in white settlers to secure it as a white dominion of the British empire. First Nations never agreed to this plan, and though some welcomed the newcomers, others resisted. This resistance would increase over time as settlers and corporations began to seize land and resources. The colonial state allowed a single, white settler to stake out and claim 160 acres or more of land (pre-emption) while forcing Indigenous people onto reserves, barring them from pre-empting land. Faced with First Nations opposition, the colony frequently responded with gunboats and violence to reinforce its control.¹²

This was the case in Victoria in 1862 when a smallpox epidemic occurred. Though some Indigenous people received a vaccine, others were not immunized, including most Indigenous peoples visiting from other parts of the province. As described by the *British Colonist* on April 28, 1862, “Police Commissioner Joseph Pemberton orders the immediate removal of all aboriginal people in Victoria, except for those ‘employed by the whites.’ He gives the Tsimshian one day to leave and arranges for a naval gunboat to ‘take up a position opposite the camp to expedite their departure.’”¹³ The spread of the disease from Victoria to other parts of the province killed thousands of Indigenous people.

■ The Hanging of Tsilhqot’in Chiefs

In the aftermath of a smallpox epidemic that killed thousands of Indigenous people in 1862–64, Tsilhqot’in warriors led by Lhatš’aš’in (Klatsassin) declared war against further white incursions into their territories, and twenty-one settlers died. The war party agreed to talks but were immediately arrested. In 1864, Judge Mathew Begbie tried and convicted six of the Tsilhqot’in Chiefs, including Lhatš’aš’in, for murder. They were executed. The provincial and federal governments have since exonerated the Chiefs for any wrongdoing and have acknowledged the hangings as a miscarriage of justice.¹⁴



Lhatš'aš?in (Klatsassin)
University of British
Columbia Archives,
F5804_2_B771

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** “Nobody Knows Him: Lhatš'aš?in and the Chilcotin War,” *Great Unsolved Mysteries* | bit.ly/2Kf9gRX

A key architect of BC’s assaults on Indigenous peoples in the colony was Joseph Trutch.¹⁵

■ Joseph Trutch

Joseph Trutch, the land commissioner of this era who became BC’s first lieutenant-governor, was the chief architect of severe provincial policies repudiating Indigenous title, refusing to discuss treaties, and allocating small reserves in order to provide land to white settlers. “The Indians have really no right to the lands they claim, nor are they of any actual value or utility to them; and I cannot see why they should either retain these lands to the prejudice of the general interests of the Colony, or be allowed to make a market of them either to Government or to individuals.”¹⁶



Joseph Trutch.
Library and Archives Canada, PA-025343

“BRITISH COLUMBIA” AND UNION WITH CANADA

Faced with pressure to join the United States, the all-white, male BC legislature decided that uniting in the newly formed Canadian federation was its best option. In 1871, BC and Ottawa signed the Terms of Union that allowed the colony to become a province of Canada.¹⁷ Three specific articles of that agreement had (and have) major implications for Indigenous peoples and other racialized groups:

- Article 11 required the Canadian government to build a railway to the Pacific (see Chapter 4);
- Article 13 outwardly tasked the federal government with authority over First Nations peoples and their lands;
- Article 14 obliged the province to introduce some form of representative government (see Chapter 3).

Article 13 appeared to have given control over First Nations peoples and their lands to the federal government. However, a closer reading of the language reveals that the province retained veto power over the administration of First Nations persons and lands: “The charge of the Indians, and the trusteeship and management of the lands reserved for their use and benefit, shall be assumed by the Dominion Government and a policy as liberal as that hitherto pursued by the British Columbia Government shall be continued by the Dominion Government after the Union.”¹⁸ Article 13, negotiated by Joseph Trutch, meant that the provincial government could institutionalize the policies promoted by Trutch, despite ostensible federal jurisdiction. As the foremost authority on this history put it, by the end of the 1870s: “The Province had won. It had imposed its views on title and reserve size, and, to ensure that they were followed, had obtained a veto over reserve land allocation for the chief commissioner of land and works, a provincial official.”¹⁹ The reserve system in BC was disastrous: “In taking away almost all their land, it had very nearly snuffed Native people out. Yet, in radically changed circumstances, Native lives were still being lived.”²⁰ And, as we demonstrate in the following pages, Indigenous resistance to colonization of their lands intensified.

The BC provincial government was able to use Article 13 to institutionalize policies that endured for more than a century, including:

- (a) an unequivocal refusal to discuss or have the courts adjudicate the question of Aboriginal title, even though the federal government was willing to do so;
- (b) repudiation of the responsibility to negotiate treaties of any sort; and
- (c) allocation of tiny reserves, the smallest in all of Canada, based on the false premise that First Nations only required small allotments allowing them to “fish as formerly.”

Forced off their land onto these reservations, Indigenous people then saw their children forced into residential schools based on the ethos of “killing the Indian in the child.” Subsequently Indigenous people were regulated out of the fisheries and prevented from hunting on their traditional territories.²¹

It is a terrible legacy that lives on, but also one that is continually challenged by Indigenous peoples themselves. In assessing BC’s history, we should keep in mind the conclusion of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls:

“Colonial violence, as well as racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, has become embedded in everyday life – whether this is through interpersonal forms of violence, through institutions like the health care system and the justice system, or in the laws, policies and structures of Canadian society. The result has been that many Indigenous people have grown up normalized to violence, while Canadian society shows an appalling apathy to addressing the issue. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls finds that this amounts to genocide.”²²

We concur with this assessment and believe that what happened in BC conforms to the UN Genocide Convention. What do you think?

● DEFINITION – GENOCIDE

The Genocide Convention states genocide may be defined as acts such as “(b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group,” or “(e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group,” committed with the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.”²³

Often caught in a jurisdictional clash between provincial and federal governments, Indigenous peoples and nations throughout BC never relinquished their faith in the fact that they were, and are, the rightful and sovereign stewards of these lands. These inherent Indigenous rights have only recently begun to be recognized in BC’s and Canada’s legal and political institutions.

INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE TO POST-UNION COLONIALISM

Based on the Trutch formula, the provincial government aggressively pursued the dispossession of Indigenous land while forcing communities onto small reserves. As the provincial government exercised its veto over land issues, the 1876 Indian Act gave the federal government legal authority on many fronts, including the expropriation of Indigenous lands, banning the potlatch and other Indigenous ceremonies, administering Indian residential schools,²⁴ and enforcing a myriad of discriminatory regulations. Against such racism and oppression, Indigenous peoples throughout BC have always opposed and resisted oppressive and tyrannical rule.

Immediately following BC’s confederation to Canada, Indigenous leaders engaged Canada’s political and legal arenas opposing the expropriation of their lands. Below are only a few examples (of many) whereby Indigenous leaders petitioned provincial, federal, and international institutions to assert their legal and inherent land rights.

One of the earliest resistances occurred in 1874 by the Stó:lō who under the leadership of Peter Ayessik, Chief of Hope, submitted a petition on behalf of himself and 109 other Chiefs to the federal Superintendent of Indian Affairs protesting the reduction of their lands and reserves.²⁵

■ Indigenous Protest and Treaty 8 in British Columbia

Massive Indigenous resistance to miners entering their territories in the northeastern area of the province (Peace River) in the late 1890s led the federal government to broker a treaty with Indigenous peoples in the area (including the Dane-Zaa speaking First Nations of Blueberry River, Doig River, Halfway River, Prophet River, Saulteau, and West Moberly).²⁶ Treaty 8 of 1899 covers a large area of northwest Alberta and northeastern BC. However, the BC government ignored this federal initiative at the time as part of its persistent rejection of Aboriginal title or treaty talks. This area is the site of the massive Site C Dam project that remains contested and that may never reach completion, as well as one of the centres of “fracking” (hydraulic fracturing of gas fields) for the natural gas industry.²⁷



► **PRIMARY SOURCE** Treaty 8 Tribal Association | treaty8.bc.ca/about

■ Petitioning King Edward VII

In 1906, Chiefs Charlie Tsulpi'multw (Cowichan), Joe Kayapálanexw (Squamish), and Basil David (Secwépemc) travelled to London, England, to meet King Edward VII and to lay before him a petition on behalf of BC First Nations leaders.²⁸ Their appeal outlined their grievances and brought significant attention to the outstanding issue of Indigenous land title and the plight of First Nations in BC.²⁹



Cowichan Chief Tsulpi'multw with Chiefs Joe Capilano and Basil David in London to deliver the Cowichan Petition, 1906. British Library Board.

In March 1911, Peter Kelly (Haida) and nearly a hundred Chiefs gathered in Victoria to present a statement³⁰ to BC Premier Richard McBride questioning the province's unlawful assertion of sovereignty over Indigenous lands and demanding the right to take their case to the courts. McBride summarily dismissed their claim of Aboriginal title and refused to allow the case to be heard in the courts.³¹

Pressure from Indian agents, some churches, and others in BC led to an Indian Act amendment in 1884, commonly known as the Potlatch Ban, that made it illegal for First Nations people to participate in cultural ceremonies, celebrations, or festivals. Through this amendment, the government specifically targeted First Nations in the West, declaring illegal the “celebration of the Indigenous festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance known as the Tamanawas [Sundance].”³² Anyone caught engaging or assisting with such ceremonies was guilty of a misdemeanour and liable to imprisonment. This section of the Indian Act was amended several times between 1884 and 1933, extending extraordinary powers to Indian agents to arrest and punish anyone caught participating or assisting in such ceremonial spaces.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** “The History of the Potlatch,” U'mista Cultural Centre | umista.ca/pages/collection-history

■ Chief Dan Cranmer (Kwakwaka'wakw)

Chief Dan Cranmer (Kwakwaka'wakw) of 'Yalis (Alert Bay) disobeyed the ban and organized a Potlatch on 'Mimkwamlis (Village Island) in December 1921. He and 44 others were arrested. Authorities threatened villagers, requiring that they surrender their Potlatch treasures or be sent to jail – 22 ended up in Oakalla Prison. The seized masks and regalia ended up in museums around the world. Only in the past 30 years have some of these sacred objects returned to the Kwakwaka'wakw, most repatriated to the U'mista (Alert Bay) and Nuyumbalees Cultural Centres (Cape Mudge). Nonetheless, thousands of stolen sacred and cultural items of the Kwakwaka'wakw (and other Indigenous nations) remain alienated from their homelands and caretakers.³³



Potlatch regalia seized by authorities in 1921.
Royal BC Museum and Archives, D-02021.

Despite these repressive measures, First Nations peoples carried on with such ceremonies, recognizing that the most important governance, political, legal, economic, cultural, and social decisions were made within such spaces. The continuance of these ceremonial practices ensured the cultural and physical survival of these Indigenous nations. Further, individuals, such as Dong Chong, a Chinese immigrant, understood the importance of these political, legal, economic, cultural, and social duties and supported Indigenous groups in carrying out such practices. For example, Chong provided supplies for the hosting of Potlatches in the area. Beyond never reporting on the illegal activities, when large Potlatch orders came in, Chong often extended store credit to those unable to pay their bills.³⁴

► **PRIMARY SOURCE** Report of the Royal Commission of Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia | bit.ly/2KunUEX

In 1884, the Indian Act was amended to legally require that children of “Indian blood” under 16 years of age were required to attend “European-style” schools. With this amendment in the late-nineteenth century, the government introduced an utmost tyrannical policy and thus ushered in the Indian residential school era. Although a law required parents to send their children to industrial, day, or boarding schools, many Indigenous families refused. In response, the Indian Act was amended on various occasions, eventually making Indian residential school attendance mandatory in 1920. Nuu-cha-nulth parents of children and youth at Christie Residential School (Hesquiaht) continually protested mistreatment of the students. In April 1917, the youth rebelled “in a kind of revolution” and that summer they attempted to burn down the school.³⁵

In BC, the federal government funded at least 22 residential schools operated by the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, and United churches



Kakawis (Christie) Indian Residential School, 1938. Archives Deschâtelets-NDC.

of Canada.³⁶ For more than a century, thousands of Indigenous children throughout the province were abducted from the loving embrace of their parents, families, and communities and forced to attend industrial, day, and residential schools where most experienced forms of physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual abuse. Tragically, many died from such abuse, never making it home to their families.

ROYAL COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia (1912-1916), commonly known as the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission, was established in 1912 to “resolve” First Nations reserve and land questions throughout the province. Valuable reserve lands, mostly in the southern and interior territories, were reduced or cancelled altogether, while reserve additions included mostly undesirable, rocky, and arid lands.³⁷



Allied Tribes gather at 1922 conference. In centre is Jane Constance Cook. Wedlidi Speck. From Leslie A. Robertson, *Standing Up*, courtesy UBC Press.

■ Allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia

In 1916, the Indian Rights Association and Interior Tribes of British Columbia united to form the Allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia in direct opposition to the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission.³⁸ Among the founding members of the Allied Indian Tribes were John Tetlenitsa (Nlaka’pamux), Peter Kelly (Haida), Charles Barton (Nis’gaa), Dennis Peters (Sto:lo), Andrew Paull (Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh), William Nahinee (Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh), and James Teit.

In 1926, the Allied Tribes petitioned the Canadian Parliament, demanding an inquiry into the Indian

► **PRIMARY SOURCE** Claims of the Allied Tribes of British Columbia, June 1926, Report and Evidence 1927 | bit.ly/2WkLgiG

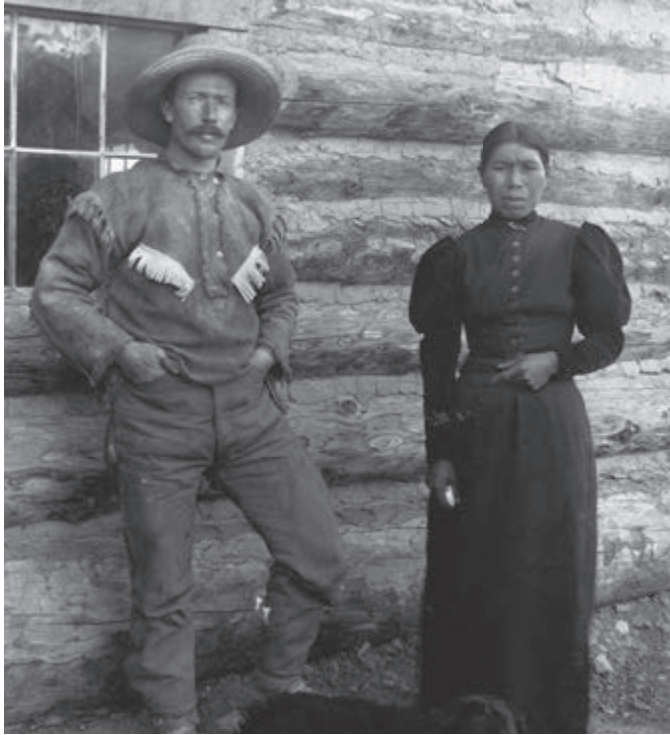


Indigenous activists Andrew Paull, Chief William Scow, and Rev. Peter Kelly (seen left to right) dedicated their careers to defending the rights of Indigenous communities. North Van Museum & Archives.

land controversy in BC and requesting a hearing at the Privy Council. In this same year, Chief William Pierrish (Neskonlith) travelled to London, England, to petition King George V on Aboriginal title and land claim matters in BC.³⁹ This led to a two week parliamentary hearing at which Andrew Paull, Peter Kelly, and other Indigenous leaders advocated for recognition of aboriginal title.⁴⁰ The federal government responded vengefully with a 1927 Indian Act amendment, making it illegal for First Nations persons to obtain funds to hire legal counsel to advance Aboriginal title cases. This ban lasted for more than two decades. Not only had the BC and federal government dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands, taken their children, and denied them access to food security, they then forbade them access to the courts.

Indigenous resistance continued in the 1930s and wartime years. The Native Brotherhood of BC, founded in 1931, became an important rallying point for Indigenous activism. The newspaper *The Native Voice* that began publication in 1946 was also important in keeping the flame of Indigenous resurgence alive in these difficult times.⁴¹

With growing international attention to human rights and increased Indigenous activism in the post-WWII era, the federal government was pressured to revise the Indian Act in 1951. Consequently, some of the more flagrant provisions, including the Potlatch ban, compulsory attendance at residential schools, and the land claims ordinance, were dropped at this time. Despite this comprehensive overhaul, the revised Act maintained its longstanding gender-discriminatory framework, which meant that First Nations women (and their children) would continue to lose their Indian status for marrying non-status men.



Ethnographer James Teit, seen here with his wife Lucy Antko, was an ally to many Indigenous communities and leaders and centred their fight for justice in his work until his death. For example, he acted as translator and lobbyist to delegations of Chiefs on several trips to Ottawa. American Museum of Natural History, ID11686

■ James Teit

From 1908 until his death in 1922, James Teit worked with the Allied Tribes and BC's Indigenous leaders to assert their claim that until the contentious land-title issue was resolved by the British high courts, the settler project in BC stood on stolen land. He started on this path at age nineteen when he left his family home in Lerwick, Shetland and headed to Spences Bridge, BC to work in his uncle's trade store. Within three years, he had moved in with a Nlaka'pamux woman, Lucy Antko (whom he later married). In addition to mastering Antko's language, he participated regularly in her community's hunting and fishing trips and community gatherings. This cultural immersion exposed him to the extreme racism and political struggle that the Nlaka'pamux and their neighbours faced daily. Teit worked much of what he learned into eleven major anthropological monographs as part of the most important collaborative and community-based research projects of the 20th century.⁴²

RED POWER AND INDIGENOUS ACTIVISM

In 1969, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's government issued its Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy (commonly known as the White Paper). This policy initiative, like many others before, aimed to quickly assimilate First Nations by abolishing the historical treaties and Indian Act (including Indian status), converting reserve lands to private property, and dismissing future discussions on Indigenous land claims.⁴³



In response to the federal government's proposed "White Paper" in 1980, UBCIC president George Manuel organized the "Constitution Express" protest movement. Trains were "rented" in order to transport over 1,000 Indigenous people from across the country to mobilize in Ottawa. Union of BC Indian Chiefs, B.CE066



■ Rose Charlie

Rose Charlie belongs to the Chehalis Band in the Stó:lō Nation, is a member of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and was named the Grand Chief of BC. Charlie founded the Indian Homemakers Association of British Columbia and the National Indian Brotherhood, now the Assembly of First Nations, and the BC Association of Non-status Indians.

She helped restore Indian status to more than 16,000 women and 46,000 first-generation children of mixed ancestry. Rose also helped found two of the most important Native women's groups in Canada: the National Association of Indian Rights for Indian Women and the Native Women's Association of Canada. In 1989, she received an honorary Doctor of Laws from UBC and the Order of BC in 2003.⁴⁴

BC leaders, including Philip Paul (W̱SÁNEĆ), Rose Charlie (Stó:lō), and Don Moses (Nlaka'pamux), quickly mobilized, organizing the Kamloops Conference in November 1969. In attendance at this conference were representatives from 144 First Nations across the country. After several days of discussions, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) was formed. In 1970, the UBCIC issued *A Declaration of Indian Rights: The BC Indian Position* (commonly known as the

Brown Paper), rejecting White Paper proposals. This declaration ultimately served as the cornerstone of the organization's position on Aboriginal title and land claims.⁴⁵ Today UBCIC, the First Nations Summit, and the BC Assembly of First Nations together form the First Nations Leadership Council to coordinate their work on Indigenous issues in the province.⁴⁶

► **PRIMARY SOURCE** Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, A Declaration of Indian Rights: the BC Indian Position Paper | bit.ly/2Kbkuae

■ LITERARY MOMENT

Lee Maracle – Memory Serves

Lee Maracle, one of this land's most powerful Indigenous writers, reflects on the resurgence of Indigenous activism in this excerpt from her 2015 collection of essays, *Memory Serves* (with permission).

“At the end of the 1960s a group of young Indigenous people started a national self-determination movement on the West Coast of British Columbia as an alternative to the historic colonial oppression of Indigenous people in Canada. This was not the first movement intent on decolonization. The youth were unaware of history because access to history had been severed. From generation to generation Indigenous people struggle to hang on to threads of our past through repeated losses. For some 150 years on the West Coast of Canada we have survived with little connection to our past ... Before I take up the banner of what men uphold as the ultimate goal – self governance, and end to home rule by Canada and the U.S. – I need to retrace my own steps, the steps of my mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, right back to our original selves. I need to review their journeys and re-claim the cultural base upon which we organized our communities. I need to know how it came to pass that Indigenous women have become devalued. I have a commitment to rebuilding the governing institutions in which Indigenous women held power alongside men.”⁴⁷

In 1973, Frank Calder (Nisga'a) and the Nisga'a Nation brought an Aboriginal title case against BC to the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC). In *Calder et al. v. Attorney General of British Columbia*,⁴⁸ a landmark SCC decision, the court ruled that Aboriginal title had existed at one point and confirmed that such title existed independent of colonial law. Although the court was split on whether Aboriginal title continued to exist, the decision paved the way for addressing Aboriginal title and future land claims in Canada.

As the federal government moved closer to constitutional reform, it appeared that Indigenous rights would remain outside its framework. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Indigenous leaders from BC served an instrumental role in Canada's constitutional reform process. For example, to bring national and international attention to Indigenous rights at this critical juncture, UBCIC President George Manuel (Neskonlith) organized the Constitution Express in 1980-81 and chartered two trains bringing representatives from Vancouver to Ottawa (with some continuing to United Nations headquarters in New York City). Members of the Constitution Express were demanding that Indigenous rights be included in Canada's patriated Constitution, resulting in the entrenchment of Section 35,⁴⁹ which broadly recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights (and those that may be so acquired).⁵⁰

With the consolidation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Constitution Act, 1982, the federal government was forced to remove gender discrimination from the Indian Act in 1985 through Bill C-31, A Bill to Amend the Indian Act.

■ Debra Toporowski

Before 1985, Debra Toporowski (Cowichan) could not be a member of the Cowichan Tribes because her Cowichan mother had married a Chinese Canadian man in Duncan. The Indian Act forced her mother to give up her status as a member of the Cowichan Nation. Through Bill C-31, Toporowski regained her Indian status, as did many Indigenous women and their children, and is today a member of Cowichan Tribes and is equally proud of her Chinese heritage.



Debra Toporowski, Cowichan Tribes Councillor, holding her Indian Status card acquired through Bill C-31. Imogene Lim.



First Nations Leadership Council representatives hold up printed copies of the UN Declaration bill tabled in B.C. on Oct 24, 2019. BC Gov Photos. Licensed with CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Nonetheless, Bill C-31 was not successful in eliminating gender discrimination, and in many regards, this amendment created new forms of discrimination. Consequently, Indigenous women such as Sharon McIvor (Nlaka'pamux) have carried on the fight against such colonial forms of gender discrimination, which continue to contribute significantly to the marginalization and violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls throughout BC and Canada.

Land claims negotiations in the province commenced at long last with the creation of the British Columbia Treaty Commission (BCTC) in September 1993. A prime goal of the comprehensive land claims process in BC is to establish certainty or "predictability" concerning land ownership and jurisdiction to resolve conflicts over land and resources. Over its nearly three-decade history, three Final Agreements (involving seven First Nations) have been negotiated, including the 2009 Tsawwassen Final Agreement; 2011 Maa-nulth Final Agreement (Huu-ay-aht First Nations, Ka:yu:k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First

Nations, Toquaht Nation, Uchucklesaht Tribe, and Yuułu it'ath First Nation); and 2016 Tla'amin Final Agreement. Still, 90 percent of the 204 First Nations in BC remain without any treaty, reluctant to accept the small land allocations, restrictions to self government, or financial terms involved.

LAND DEFENCE, REDRESS, AND INDIGENOUS NATIONHOOD

Although questions concerning Aboriginal title were beginning to move through BC's treaty process in late 1993, there remained looming uncertainties, increased anxieties, and heightened tensions in years to follow. For example, in the summer of 1995, Sundancers held ceremony space at Ts'Peten (Gustafsen Lake) in Secwépemc territory. Tension escalated when an American rancher/property owner requested that the Sundancers leave the property immediately, resulting in the deployment of an RCMP emergency response unit to Ts'Peten in early September. The militarized siege

ended on September 17 when the land defenders exited the ceremonial space and were arrested immediately. During the trial, it was revealed that the RCMP actively engaged in a smear campaign with the expressed intent to secure public support for the provincial and federal governments and denounce Aboriginal title claims.⁵¹

Since the 1973 Calder decision, First Nations in BC have won ground-breaking Aboriginal title cases in Canada's highest court. In the 1997 *Delgamuukw*⁵² decision, the SCC made another landmark decision on the question of Aboriginal title, providing important information and clarity on its definition, concerns about the province's unlawful extinguishment of Aboriginal title, and recognized the importance of oral testimony. Through *Delgamuukw*, the SCC created a three-point test for Indigenous nations to prove Aboriginal title, which involved establishing sufficient, continuous, and exclusive evidence of territorial occupation. In the 2014 *Tsilhqot'in* decision,⁵³ the SCC affirmed that the *Tsilhqot'in* Nation held uninterrupted Aboriginal title to their territories (approximately 1,700 square kilometres). The importance of the *Tsilhqot'in* decision is that the SCC confirmed that recognition of Aboriginal title means that governments must move beyond the narrow duty-to-consult principle and engage in meaningful consultation with Indigenous groups that hold the right to occupy lands in order to decide on land use and manage the land and natural resources.

2015 | FINAL REPORT OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

In 2015, the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was released and included 94 Calls to Action to eradicate systemic racism in Canadian society.⁵⁴ In 2019, the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was released and also included a cross-sectoral approach to eliminating systemic racism and violence.⁵⁵ These reports on the history of Indian residential schools combined with well-documented evidence of gendered violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA are illustrated in BC by the tragedies and racist impunity associated with BC's Highway of Tears and Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The reports reveal the sorrowful legacies of settler colonialism, their perpetual and enduring violence cycles, while clearly identifying recommendations concerning redress and justice.

The BC provincial government passed legislation in October 2019 to adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, formally titled Bill 41 – 2019: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.⁵⁶ The enactment of Bill 41 was indeed an important first step for this government, which had yet to squarely address its historical treatment of Indigenous peoples and its unwillingness to respect and uphold the political, legal, and human rights of Indigenous peoples throughout the province. A few months after the adoption of Bill 41, however, the province authorized the RCMP to once again invade *Wet'suwet'en* territory.

Although *Wet'suwet'en* land defence dates back many decades, the current movement is primarily rooted in *Wet'suwet'en* Clan opposition to pipeline projects beginning in the early 2000s. In recent years, corporations, courts, and governments have responded with injunctions and state violence, including RCMP assaults on *Wet'suwet'en* land defenders in 2019 and 2020. This violent state aggression has led to an outpouring of national and international support (involving solidarity actions in more than 70 cities worldwide) in 2020.⁵⁷ This battle is but one example of an Indigenous nation in a contest for their land and livelihood. *Wet'suwet'en* land defence is about much more than protecting the land from the environmental threats of industry. It is about preserving the *yintah* (a *Wet'suwet'en* expression for "territory") that *Wet'suwet'en* people belong to and are one with, which has sustained the people since time immemorial.⁵⁸

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Emma Stark, as a child. She became the first Black teacher on Vancouver Island and taught in a one-room school in Cedar. Salt Spring Island Archives, 989024010.

“BRITISH COLUMBIA”? 1858: ORIGINS OF BLACK AND CHINESE COMMUNITIES

Given that First Nations have lived on the Coast for thousands of years, non-indigenous peoples were, and are, newcomers to these territories. In the era of the fur trade, early arrivers included Quebecers, Métis, inland First Nations, Hawaiians (Kānaka Maoli), and European peoples.¹

By 1858 James Douglas, governor of the Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, was worried about the onslaught of thousands of US citizens heading north for the gold rush. To help stabilize the British colonies and to keep this area from American hands, Douglas invited people of African descent living in California to settle in the colony.²

► **ORIGINAL SOURCE** Colonial Despatches | bcgenesis.uvic.ca



Salt Spring Island Archives, 20008009009.

■ Maria Mahoi

Of Indigenous and Hawaiian heritage, Maria Mahoi identified as Kānaka Maoli. A skilled midwife, homemaker, and gardener, she raised her family on Russell Island, now part of the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve. Often employed in the early fur trade, Kanaka Maoli were among the earliest newcomers to these territories.

THE ORIGINS OF BLACK COMMUNITIES

The Black community in San Francisco was well organized, holding regular meetings at the First African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church to discuss how they could overcome the civil, business, labour, and legal injustices they faced daily. These discussions also included the possibility of emigrating to Panama, Sonora, or Canada.

At the Zion Church on the evening of April 14, 1858, the community was celebrating the release of a fugitive slave. In the midst of these celebrations, Jeremiah Nagle, captain of the steamship Commodore, which sailed regularly between San Francisco and Victoria, arrived at the meeting. Nagle came well-prepared with maps of Vancouver Island and a letter from “a gentleman in the service of the Hudson’s Bay Company of undoubted veracity” giving details about the colony and welcoming the Black people.³ The letter has not survived but it is believed that, given the nature of the information provided by Nagle, the letter could only have come from Governor James Douglas.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** BC Black History Awareness Society | bcblackhistory.ca | “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots” – *Marcus Mosiah Garvey Jr.*

Another meeting was held to form a committee of 65 people who were to embark the next day on the Commodore for Victoria. Only 35 were able to make the sailing in time. The next day they were seen off at the wharves by almost the entire Black community. Committee members arrived in Victoria on April 25 and subsequently a delegation met with Governor Douglas. Based on the meetings with Jeremiah Nagle on behalf of Douglas, they understood that they could:

- purchase land in the colony at a rate of five dollars per acre, which was considered an exorbitant price;
- after nine months’ residence any landholder had the right to vote and to sit on juries; and
- have the right to all the protection of the law;
- to become British subjects, however, they needed to reside here for seven years and take an oath of allegiance.⁴

Over the next several months, Black people began settling in the Colony of Vancouver Island. The majority came from the western states where they faced restrictive government legislation, ambivalence towards slave laws, beatings, insults, and legalized injustice; even free Black people were denied citizenship. Over the next decade, nearly one thousand would come to the colony of whom at least 140 were women.⁵ Soon Douglas's involvement and support diminished, leaving these pioneers to rely on their own industry, character, and ingenuity to make a life for themselves and their families.

A San Francisco clergyman, Reverend Moore, explained: "The writer having had the honor and pleasure of being one of the conductors of the educational, moral and religious interests of the colored community for the last 6 to 7 years, that the Black newcomers came ... (1) to better their political condition; in California they were disenfranchised; (2) to enjoy those common social rights that civilized, enlightened and well-regulated communities guarantee; (3) to make it the land of our adoption for ourselves and our children."⁷

According to Reverend Moore, the Black newcomers purchased thousands of dollars' worth of real estate on this island and up the river. They purchased urban property within the boundaries of the areas that is known today as Victoria and Saanich; others purchased or pre-empted farmland. In the Victoria City Real Estate Assessment Roll for the year commencing July 1, 1864, Peter Lester is listed as owning nine properties in addition to his Vancouver Street residence.

In this era, anti-slavery sentiments to some extent remained part of colonial culture and the Alien Act of 1861 enabled Black people to become naturalized British subjects. Having met the property requirements, 52 Black newcomers were added to the voter's list.

■ LITERARY MOMENT

Among the first to arrive was Priscilla Stewart [dates unknown], who penned this poem⁶ in 1858 capturing the spirit of the Black newcomers.

*A Voice from the Oppressed
to the Friends of Humanity
Composed by one of the suffering class.*

Look and behold our sad despair
Our hopes and prospects fled,
The tyrant slavery entered here,
And laid us all for dead.

Sweet home! When shall we find a home?
If the tyrant says that we must go
The love of gain the reason,
And if humanity dare say "no"
Then they are tried for treason.

God bless the Queen's majesty,
Her sceptre and her throne,
She looked on us with sympathy,
And offered us a home.

Far better breathe Canadian air,
Where all are free and well,
Than live in slavery's atmosphere
And wear the chains of hell.

Farewell to our native land,
We must wave the parting hand,
Never to see thee any more,
But seek a foreign land.

Farewell to our true friends,
Who've suffered dungeon and death.
Who have a claim upon our gratitude
Whilst God shall lend us breath.

May God inspire your hearts,
A Marion raise your hands;
Never desert your principles
Until you've redeemed your land.

SLAVERY IN CANADA

Beginning in the 1500s, more than 18 million African men, women, and children were forcibly uprooted and transported to the Americas (including the Caribbean) and Europe and enslaved. Slavery occurred in Canada in early 1600. An imperial act by the British parliament abolished slavery in the colonies effective August 1, 1834.

In November of 2014, the United Nations passed a resolution which proclaimed that the International Decade for People of African Descent would commence January 1, 2015, and end December 31, 2024. "In proclaiming this Decade, the international community is recognizing that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected." The

theme of the decade is "People of African Descent: Recognition, Justice and Development."⁹

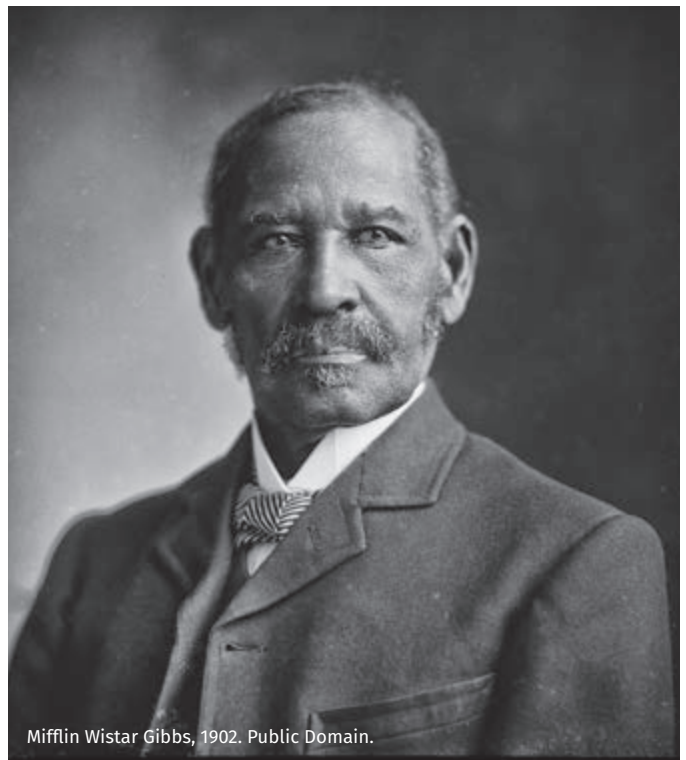
► Primary Source United Nations | bit.ly/34BbYrT

A United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent visited Canada in 2016 and its 2017 report concluded: "Despite the reputation [of Canada] for promoting multiculturalism and diversity and the positive measures taken by the national and provincial governments, the Working Group is deeply concerned about the structural racism that lies at the core of many Canadian institutions and the systemic anti-Black racism that continues to have a negative impact on the human rights situation of African Canadians."¹⁰

■ Mifflin Wistar Gibbs

Mifflin Wistar Gibbs was the de facto leader of the Black community in Victoria beginning in 1858. Prior to his arrival, Gibbs was a successful businessman, community leader, and a staunch supporter and ally of abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Gibbs's achievements and accomplishments in BC include partnership in the Lester & Gibbs emporium, which was considered a competitor of the Hudson's Bay Company in gold-rush Victoria; builder of the first railway in Haida Gwaii (formerly 'Queen Charlotte Islands'); Victoria city councillor in 1867, 1868, and 1869; chair of the finance committee and acting mayor; and delegate representing Salt Spring Island at the Yale Convention in September 1868 that helped to frame the terms of BC's entry into Confederation. Gibbs returned to the United States in 1870, where he pursued a career in law, eventually becoming the first elected Black municipal judge in the United States. In 1897, he was appointed by President McKinley as US consul to Madagascar. In 1902, he published *Shadow and Light: An Autobiography, with Reminiscences of the Last and Present Century*.

As historian Jean Barman suggests, "Victoria's black community, made up of several hundred largely middle-class men and women"⁸ were educated and skilled, became community leaders, business leaders, ministers, school board trustees, and teachers. Others pre-empted land and built thriving farms. The Stark family, among others, settled on Salt Spring Island. Some, including



Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, 1902. Public Domain.

Charles and Nancy Alexander, settled in Saanich, 18 kilometres north of Victoria and helped construct the Shady Creek Methodist Church, now the Central Saanich United Church. Charles Alexander was one of the first preachers. Today, more than one hundred descendants of the Alexander and Stark families live in British Columbia.



Faced with white resistance to their joining the Victoria Fire Department, community leaders suggested they form a militia to defend the colony – thus was born the Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps. A racist backlash against the Corps ended with the new governor of the colony, Arthur Kennedy, refusing to support them and the volunteers disbanded in disgust. Royal BC Museum and Archives, C-06124.

However, the newcomers to the colonies also encountered “intense discrimination” and, over the next few years, everyday racism took its toll.

■ Facing Everyday Racism

The Reverend M. MacFie resisted the Black community’s desire to worship with existing congregations: “We have received a circular addressed to all Impartial Men and Lovers of Right. It is issued by the Rev. W.F. Clarke. It appears a serious difference of opinion exists between him and his religious colleague the Rev. M. MacFie, respecting the propriety of mixing, promiscuously, colored with white Christians in church during Divine service. Both gentlemen were sent here as missionaries by the English Congregational Missionary Society. Mr. Clark holds that Christianity knows no difference between the white and colored man; and therefore he will not suit the prejudices of anyone by creating a ‘negro’s corner’ in his church. As a matter of ‘taste’ Mr. MacFie prefers separating them.”¹¹

In the fall of 1859, a Select School was opened by the Sisters of St. Ann. “Some parents of African American children wanted to send their children to the Select School but were turned down due to a fear

of integration and the students of the Select School being uncomfortable. Bishop Demers overrode Mother Providence’s decision and opened the school for all. However, parents of the white children who made up the population of the Select school threatened to remove their children from the school. This forced Bishop Demers to remove his decree and allow the schools to be set up as originally planned with the Select School being made up of mostly white children.”¹²

Emil Sutro, a performer who refused to go on stage because “coloureds” were seated in the front row complained: “let one part of the house be reserved for their particular use. They are not desired, and are furthermore offensive to a majority of the residents of Victoria.”¹³

A Black resident, John Dunlop reported that even though he had been asked to buy a ticket to a performance, “I went to the door, presented my ticket, and was refused admission on the ground of my colour.”¹⁴

Everyday racism and the end of the US Civil War, beginning the end of slavery, made a return to the United States attractive to many of the one thousand

or so people of African descent who came to the colony of Vancouver Island in this early period.¹⁵ Despite the success and perseverance of those early newcomers and Black communities in BC and Canada, in 1911 the federal government imposed new regulations (PC 1911-1324) under the Immigration Act prohibiting the landing in Canada “of any immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada.” Although only half of the original one thousand Black newcomers remained in the province they succeeded in numerous walks of life. However, the 1911 immigration restrictions limited further community expansion, making Hogan’s Alley in Vancouver an important centre of Black life in the province.

■ Emily Stark

Emily Stark was born in California on February 17, 1856; the eldest daughter of Sylvia and Louis Stark; she was four years old when her family arrived on Salt Spring Island, BC, in 1860. In 1873, Emma attained her high school certificate which was the qualification to teach at that time. On August 1, 1874, at the age of 18, Emma was hired to teach in a one-room school in the Cedar district near Nanaimo, becoming the first Black teacher on Vancouver Island.



THE ORIGINS OF CHINESE COMMUNITIES

Chinese migrants also arrived in large numbers during the 1858 Gold Rush, the first arriving from California followed by thousands more from southern China. Most headed into the Interior, to the Fraser Canyon, or later to points north such as Barkerville.¹⁶ Though frictions existed between some Chinese and Indigenous peoples, they also “formed great friendships.”¹⁷

► **VIDEO LINK:** Explore Fraser Canyon mining sites in this 11-minute subtitled video, part of the Fraser Corridor Heritage Landscape Project | bit.ly/34SYFUB¹⁸

As the gold ran out, so too did the luck of the Chinese miners, and they often relied on the support of First Nations to survive. Victoria’s Chinatown, the first in Canada, grew into an important centre for Chinese arriving on the Coast and for those returning from the Interior.¹⁹ There, a merchant elite came to prominence and, in 1864, Lee Chong, a Chinese merchant in Victoria, pleaded for equal treatment in a petition to Vancouver Island’s new governor, Arthur Kennedy.²⁰



A prospector of Chinese heritage crossing the Ashcroft Bridge, about 1882. Royal BC Museum Archives, C-01274.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** Victoria’s Chinatown: A Gateway to the Past and Present of Chinese Canadians | chinatown.library.uvic.ca

In 1866, the two colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia on the mainland merged, with New Westminster initially the capital, followed by Victoria in 1868. The politics of the era focused on the land – how to get First Nations off their territories and make it available for settlers, particularly British settlers, as spelled out in the land ordinance of 1870:

3. From and after the date of the proclamation in this Colony on her Majesty’s assent to this Ordinance, any Male person being a British subject, of the age of eighteen years or over, may acquire the right to pre-empt any tract of unoccupied, unsurveyed, and unreserved Crown Lands (not being an Indian settlement) not exceeding Three Hundred and Twenty Acres in extent in that portion of the Colony situated to the Northward and Eastward of the Cascade or Coast Range of Mountains, and One Hundred and Sixty Acres in extent in the rest of the Colony. Provided that such right of pre-emption shall not be held to extend to any of the Aborigines of this continent, except to such as shall have obtained the Governor’s special permission in writing to that effect.²¹

This ordinance reflected the consolidation of the Trutch perspective on Indigenous affairs – denying aboriginal title, refusing to negotiate treaties, forcing Indigenous peoples onto small reserves and then refusing to even allow them to apply as settlers on their own land. As one of the prime negotiators of the Terms of Union that brought BC into Canada, Trutch assured this approach would be embedded constitutionally.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For stories related to this era, see Jean Barman, *On the Cusp of Contact: Gender, Space and Race in the West*, edited by Margery Fee (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2020); *French Canadians, Furs, and Indigenous Women in the Making of the Pacific Northwest* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015); Jean Barman and Bruce McIntyre Watson, *Leaving Paradise: Indigenous Hawaiians in the Pacific Northwest, 1787–1898* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).
- ² Crawford Kilian, *Go Do Some Great Thing: The Black Pioneers of British Columbia*, 2nd rev. ed. (Toronto: Commodore Books, 2008), 26–27. Another important source for the early history of Blacks in BC is James William Pilton, “Negro Settlement in British Columbia, 1858–1871” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1951), accessed October 31, 2020, bit.ly/3b09VBE
- ³ Kilian, *Go Do Some Great Thing*, 14–19.
- ⁴ Kilian, *Go Do Some Great Thing*, 30, 31.
- ⁵ Sherry Edmunds-Flett, “A Home for Our Children in the Right Place,” chap. 3 in *African Canadian Women in British Columbia, 1858–1938*, accessed October 27, 2020, bit.ly/3aU2H2m
- ⁶ From Wayne Compton, *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001), 49–50. Permission needed.
- ⁷ “Coloured Emigrants,” *British Colonist*, February 5, 1859.
- ⁸ Jean Barman, “Distant Oversight, 1858–1871,” chap. 3 in *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 79.
- ⁹ United Nations, International Decade for People of African Descent 2015–2024, accessed August 14, 2020, bit.ly/3rCYiGW
- ¹⁰ United Nations, “Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent on Its Mission to Canada,” 15, accessed October 27, 2020, bit.ly/38NnBNF
- ¹¹ Editorial, “Religious Feud,” *Daily Colonist*, October 21, 1859.
- ¹² *The Sisters of St. Ann: The First Ten Years*, accessed August 15, 2020, bit.ly/2KOMcd0
- ¹³ *Daily Colonist*, September 27, 1861.
- ¹⁴ *Daily Colonist*, November 23, 1865.
- ¹⁵ Compton, *Bluesprint*, 19.
- ¹⁶ Lily Chow, *Sojourners in the North* (Prince George, BC: Caitlin Press, 1996).
- ¹⁷ Bev Sellars, *Price Paid: The Fight for First Nations Survival* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2016), 86.
- ¹⁸ Fraser Corridor Heritage Landscape Project, accessed December 14, 2020, bit.ly/34TG3U2
- ¹⁹ University of Victoria, *Victoria’s Chinatown: A Gateway to the Past and Present of Chinese Canadians*, accessed October 27, 2020, chinatown.library.uvic.ca.
- ²⁰ “Chinese Address to the Governor,” *British Daily Colonist*, April 5, 1864, 3.
- ²¹ From the main study of land ordinances in BC, Robert E. Cail, *Land, Man, and the Law: The Disposition of Crown Lands in British Columbia, 1871–1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1974), 251.



Nam Sing was likely the first Chinese person to arrive in the Cariboo. He came to the Quesnelle area around 1859 by canoe up the Fraser River from Yale, but finding insufficient gold to make prospecting worthwhile, he cleared land and grew vegetables. In 1865, he turned to market gardening, ranching, and operated freight teams to ship his produce to Barkerville and surrounding areas. Royal BC Museum Archives – G-03059.



Tomekichi Homma, a successful labour organizer and community leader of Richmond, BC, took the BC government to court in 1900 when he was denied the right to vote. Nikkei National Museum 1994.88.3.1.

“BRITISH COLUMBIA”? A FRANCHISE ACT FROM THE ERA OF SLAVERY

In 1870, BC was still an independent colony in the British Empire. The colony joined the Canadian federation based on Article 13 that consolidated a specific regime of racial power in BC based on the repudiation of First Nations as people, outright rejection of any notion of Aboriginal title, and sustained opposition to negotiation of treaties. On the other hand, Article 14 called for an elected provincial legislature that seemed on the surface to be a positive step away from the tight colonial clique that had ruled in the name of the Queen.¹ As it turned out, however, BC’s 1872 legislation on voting marked a radical turning point whereby white power and privilege came to be institutionalized in an unprecedented manner.

Despite decades of colonial control and the ravages of disease, First Nations in the province and racialized peoples (Chinese, Black, and mixed-race peoples) were by far the majority, numbering around 40,000 compared to fewer than 10,000 Europeans.² The small group of 25 white, male legislators elected in 1871 were anxious to expand their electoral support since voting regulations restricted voting only to propertied men who were literate. Enlarging the number of voters brought up the question of race. In the legislative debate on removing the literacy and property requirements, one legislator expressed his fears succinctly: “We might, after next election, see an Indian occupying the Speaker’s Chair, or have a Chinese majority in the House.”³ The legislators resolved their racial anxiety by removing the literacy and property qualifications (expanding the number of voters) on the one hand, and then inserted a special clause (article 13): “Nothing in this Act shall be construed to extend to or include or apply to Chinese and Indians.”⁴ In passing this election law, the legislators allowed white men, regardless of property or literacy levels, to vote but then disenfranchised more than 80 percent of the people of the province, including all women.

Few histories of BC fully explore the details or implications of this legislation. Just after the US Civil War, Congress passed the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed that African American voting rights could not be “denied or abridged by the United States or by

any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”⁵ To put it plainly, BC legislators approved and imposed this racist, legal statute at a time when the federal and state governments in the US had specifically prohibited such an act. In effect, BC’s white legislators had, by denying the rights of citizenship to First Nations and Chinese, turned back the clock to implement racist laws not dissimilar to the legal prohibitions imposed on African Americans during slavery. BC had become a province like no other.

The story does not end there. Some people may look back at this period and surmise that it was just the way things were, “everyone was racist back then.” In fact, there were objections to the legislation even at the time. The then premier of the province, J.F. McCreight, refused for the bill to be proclaimed into law because it seemed wrong to limit voting based on “nationality, race or colour,” it contravened imperial instructions to avoid limiting the rights of non-Europeans in a way that violated international treaties, and it violated federal jurisdiction over Indigenous affairs when the “Indian population of the province amounted to 50,000 souls.”⁶

Stalled by McCreight, the act was forwarded to the federal government, where it was examined by none other than John A. Macdonald, who with the deputy minister of justice, dismissed McCreight’s objections.⁷ The bill received royal assent that October.⁸ Macdonald and the federal government had acted decisively to bolster white supremacy on the Pacific. In the words of the *Daily Colonist*, the new law “brings within the pale of the electoral franchise every bona fide resident British subject who takes the trouble to register. It also, by explicit words, excludes Indians and Chinese. Here, indeed, is a great and important victory for the liberal party in the House.”⁹

This domination of a white minority would continue for the next 70 years, with citizens of Japanese and South Asian descent added to the list of excluded others in 1895 and 1907, respectively.¹⁰ White women won the right to vote in 1917, but Indigenous and Asian Canadian men and women remained disenfranchised.

The ban on voting, extended to both municipal and federal spheres, had dire consequences – racialized people had little means to exert electoral pressure on politicians to change the laws or to stop further racist laws from being passed. The ban also meant First Peoples and Asian Canadians could not obtain certification to practise in professions such as law or to serve as a school trustee. In subsequent years, the BC legislature passed hundreds of racist laws or regulations discriminating against First Nations or Asian Canadians.¹¹ It also pressured the federal government to ban or limit immigration from Asia, ensuring that the white minority would eventually become the white majority.

Many people in this province are aware of the civil rights movement in the United States yet few are aware of the civil rights movement in this province. Asian Canadians fought hard to assert their right to vote.

■ Tomekichi Homma

Tomekichi Homma, a naturalized British subject, walked into a polling booth in 1900 and asked to be placed on the voter’s list. His was a deliberate act to challenge the provincial legislation that read: “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.” He was refused. With the support of the community, Homma challenged the matter in court. Both the county court and Supreme Court in BC ruled in his favour. The BC Government refused to accept the decisions, appealing to the Privy Council in London. BC’s attorney-general of the day, D.M. Eberts, argued: “Even if they exercised the franchise properly, it is intolerable that these foreign races, which can never be assimilated with our population, should in many constituencies determine who shall represent the people in the legislature.” The British Privy Council agreed with Eberts, arguing that voting was a privilege, not a right, and that voting could be denied to Japanese or Chinese Canadians just as it was denied to women.

► **VIDEO LINK** The Story of Tomekichi Homma | bit.ly/3nH0xqc

Won Alexander Cumyow, a Chinese Canadian activist and lawyer who the provincial bar association refused to licence, also demanded the right to vote in 1902.¹² Husain Rahim, a newcomer from South Asia, challenged the ban against South Asians voting in 1911 and faced persecution for his efforts.¹³ Japanese Canadian

Kartar Singh, Kapoor Singh, Dr. Durai Pal Pandia, and Mayo Singh, celebrating winning amnesty for undocument South Asian migrants in 1939, and would help win the franchise in 1947. Sarjit K. Siddoo, and Dr. Hugh Johnston, author of *Jewels of the Qila*.



Samuel Hayakawa, Minoru Kobayashi, Hide Hyodo Shimizu, and Edward Banno (left to right) at Parliament to campaign for voting rights. NNM 2000.14.1.1.

veterans who had fought in World War I petitioned for the right to vote in 1920 but a coalition of white veterans and women’s groups mobilized to defeat the measure. A small number of Japanese Canadian veterans finally won the right to vote in 1931.

In 1936, second-generation Japanese Canadians (Nisei) formed the Japanese Canadian Citizens League and, with the support of Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) Member of Parliament Angus MacInnis, sent a delegation to Ottawa to press the Elections and Franchise Acts Committee of Parliament for the right to vote. Despite an eloquent presentation of their case, the committee rebuffed their request.

In 1939, Dr. D.P. Pandia, an Indian lawyer and former secretary to Gandhi, worked with communities to successfully lobby Ottawa for an amnesty for undocumented newcomers. Kapoor Singh Siddoo, Mayo Singh, and Kartar Singh Hundal enlisted the assistance of H.S.L. Polak, a long-time associate of Gandhi, to bring pressure for the right to vote.¹⁴





A 1943 South Asian delegation to the provincial legislature to lobby for voting rights. IWA Local 1-80.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** (Dis)Enfranchisement, 1907–1947: The Forty-Years Struggle for the Vote, an exhibit of the South Asian Studies Institute, University of the Fraser Valley | www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/the-vote

During the war, many First Peoples and Asian Canadians joined the Canadian military, and community organizations organized again to press for the vote. Others, however, took the stance that they would not fight if they could not vote.

■ 1943 Delegation

A twelve-person delegation, including Naginder Singh Gill and other leaders of the Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver; Sir Robert Holland of Victoria; Harold Winch of the CCF; and Harold Pritchett, district president of the International Woodworkers of America (IWA), met with Premier John Hart in March 1943 to argue for the right to vote. Also attending were World War I veterans Phagan Singh and G.S. Badall. Despite demonstrating their support for the war effort in the form of several hundred thousand dollars in war bonds, Hart refused to act.



Veterans from the war had a strong case – if they were good enough to die for their country, surely they were good enough to vote!¹⁵

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** Chinese Canadian Military Museum Society | ccmms.ca

For many years, activists from Chinese Canadian communities in Vancouver and Victoria had been lobbying for the right to vote. Under the umbrella of the Chinese Canadian Association, Low Kwong Joe (Joseph Hope) of Victoria, and Foon Sien Wong, Andrew Lam, Ann Chinn, Velma Chan, Esther Fung, Henry Lee, Joseph Leong, and Gordon Cumyow in Vancouver, took up the fight and organized petitions and sent delegations to lobby the BC government in the 1940s. Increasingly, Chinese Canadian leaders began to coordinate their efforts with the South Asian community. By then the IWA had hired Roy Mah and Darshan Singh Sangha as union organizers.

Won Alexander Cumyow was one of the leaders of the Chinese Canadian Association. City of Vancouver archives, AM1523-S6-F54--: 2008-010.2280



Lila Wong fought in World War II and was among the first Asian Canadians to vote after 1947. Cumberland Museum and Archives, C040-328.

■ Velma Chan

Velma Chan was a member of a seven-person Chinese Canadian Association delegation that met with the BC premier and cabinet in early 1945 to press for the right to vote. The delegation submitted a petition and written statement demanding the right to vote, pointing out that Chinese Canadians “are not allowed to vote in municipal, provincial or federal elections. They are denied employment in public services and are barred from practising law and pharmacy.” Chan was an activist in the BC labour movement as well as in Vancouver’s Chinatown. She was a part owner of China Arts and Crafts, a centre for China-Canada friendship in the 1960s and 1970s.



Velma Chan was an activist in Vancouver’s Chinatown and a member of the Chinese Canadian Association delegation that lobbied BC premier John Hart in 1945 for the right to vote. CBC Archives.

■ First Nations Fight For the Franchise

For First Nations the fight for the right to vote was more complicated. A 1906 petition to the King prepared by First Nations meeting in Cowichan to demand recognition of Aboriginal title recorded: “We have no vote, if we had it might have been different: but as it is we are at the mercy of those [who have] no mercy.”¹⁶ Federally, Indigenous people could vote but only if they gave up their status as members of their communities. Squamish (Sḵwxw 7mesh) leader Andy Paull (Xwechtáal) advised against voting: “You would be merely selling your birthright for the doubtful privilege of putting a cross on a ballot every four years.”¹⁷ Others, including the Native Brotherhood, lobbied hard for the right to vote.

In the legislature, CCF members introduced motions to put an end to the racist legislation but faced serious opposition.

■ George S. Pearson

George S. Pearson, secretary of state and minister of labour in the B.C. government responded: “There should be more than nationality in order for persons to enjoy the franchise. The Hindu is not helping us to maintain the standard of living we have set up in the province. There is nobody in the province as unreliable, dishonest and deceitful as the Hindus. We cannot get information from them. They break every regulation we have. We know of cases where Hindus had to pay other Hindus to get jobs. Chinese are the worry of our lives in the Labour Department, and Japanese were also. We are justified in excluding them from the full rights of citizenship.”¹⁸

In 1946, Asian Canadians and Native Brotherhood representatives appeared before the BC Elections Act Committee and pressure mounted for the right to vote after the war.

■ Frank Arthur Calder

Frank Arthur Calder was born in Nass Harbour, Nisga'a territory on August 3, 1915. He died November 4, 2006, in Victoria, BC. Frank Calder was the first Indigenous member of the BC legislature, elected in 1949. Calder is best known for his role in the Nisga'a Tribal Council's Supreme Court case against the province of British Columbia (commonly known as the Calder case), which demonstrated that Aboriginal title (i.e., ownership) to traditional lands exists in modern Canadian law.¹⁹



Frank Arthur Calder. Courtesy Nisga'a Lisims Government.

Finally, after decades of pressing for the right to vote, the provincial government conceded and began to enfranchise Asian Canadian men and women beginning with Canadians of South Asian and Chinese heritage in April 1947.²⁰ Even then the legislature inserted a language qualification for voting, an impediment that was not removed until 1980. In 1949, the BC legislature finally conceded the right to vote provincially for Japanese Canadians and First Nations.²¹ Similar efforts at the municipal level finally led to enfranchisement at that level. First Nations only won the right to vote federally in 1960.



Rosemary Brown Canada Post commemorative stamp. Issued on February 2, 2009

■ Rosemary Brown

Politician, feminist, writer, educator, lecturer, and mother, Rosemary Brown has contributed much to BC and Canada, including being the first Black woman elected to a Canadian provincial legislature (BC). Brown ran for the leadership of the federal NDP Party in 1975. Some of her many awards include: United Nations, Human Rights Fellowship (1973); Government of British Columbia, Order of British Columbia (1995); Government of Canada, Order of Canada (1996); and Canadian Labour Congress, Award for Outstanding Service to Humanity (2002). Since her death in 2003, the Rosemary Brown Award for Women was established and is awarded annually to recognize and honour a BC-based woman or organization that promotes the values and ideals that Rosemary Brown championed.

The movement for civil and democratic rights did not end with the winning of the franchise but has continued in the fight for human and democratic rights. This includes the movement for decolonization, for justice, and for a province free from discrimination of all types. (See bit.ly/3qho1nf). The BC Black History Awareness Society has catalogued (1858-1978) the civil, human rights and social issues relating to discrimination in housing, employment, hotel accommodations and access to entertainment and recreational facilities (bit.ly/3d7LLuZ). Recalling the history of the fight for the franchise, and honouring those who fought for it, for decolonization, and for other democratic rights is essential moving forward.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Order of Her Majesty in Council admitting British Columbia into the Union, dated the 16th day of May, 1871 (Terms of Union), accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/2JzFHug
- ² Various estimates for the population exist ranging from 36,000 (Belshaw) to 50,000 (McCreight, see text). See John Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia A Population History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); [set out McCreight source here and repeat short form in note 6].
- ³ "First Provincial Legislative Assembly," *British Daily Colonist*, April 6, 1872, 3.
- ⁴ *The Qualification and Registration of Voters Act, 1871*, S.B.C. 1872, c. 39, s. 13.
- ⁵ United States *Statutes at Large*, 16, 346. This bill amending the US Constitution was passed by a joint session of Congress on February 27, 1869, and ratified by three-quarters of the states then in existence on March 30, 1870. See *Statutes at Large*, 16, 1131.
- ⁶ Attorney General to the Lieutenant-Governor, April 17, 1872, Statutes of BC, 1872, 4.
- ⁷ See Macdonald's justification in Copy of a Report of a Committee of the Honourable the Privy Council, approved by His Excellency the Governor-General in Council on the September 30, 1872, in *Statutes of BC*, 1872, 6–7.
- ⁸ *BC Gazette*, October 26, 1872, 2.
- ⁹ *BC Gazette*, October 26, 1872, 2; "Great Victory, More Evidence," October 27, 1872, *Daily British Colonist*, 2.
- ¹⁰ *Provincial Voters' Act Amendment Act, 1895*, S.B.C. 1895, c. 20, s. 2; *Provincial Elections Act Amendment Act, 1907*, S.B.C. 1907, c. 16, s. 3.
- ¹¹ A government-mandated review of provincial laws and regulations that discriminated against Chinese found 223 measures had been passed from 1871 on. See British Columbia, *Chinese Legacy BC Legislation Review* (Victoria: BC Government, 2017). No similar study has been undertaken regarding legislation concerning First Nations or other Asian Canadians.
- ¹² Report on the Royal Commission of Chinese and Japanese Immigration: Report and Evidence, Ottawa, 1902 (see Won Alexander Cumyow's submission to the commission, 235 and 296).
- ¹³ Rahim was arrested and charged but was exonerated, see *Re Rahim* (1911) 17 B.C.R. 276.
- ¹⁴ See *(Dis)Enfranchisement, 1907–1947: The Forty-Year Struggle for the Vote*, an exhibit mounted by the South Asian Studies Institute at the University of the Fraser Valley, accessed December 15, 2020, www.southasiancanadianheritage.ca/the-vote/.
- ¹⁵ See Chinese Canadian Military Museum Society, accessed December 15, 2020, www.ccmms.ca.
- ¹⁶ "Indians' Petition to King Edward," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, July 6, 1906, 8.
- ¹⁷ E. Palmer Patterson, "Andrew Paull and Canadian Indian Resurgence" (PhD diss., University of Washington), 1962.
- ¹⁸ "Reserves Decision on Election Bill," *Daily Colonist*, March 9, 1944, 2.
- ¹⁹ From Frank Calder, *Canadian Encyclopedia*, accessed December 14, 2020, bit.ly/38DFa2E. Nisga'a tribute to their leader, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/2WS42yb
- ²⁰ *Provincial Elections Act Amendment Act, 1947*, S.B.C. 1947, c. 28, s. 14.
- ²¹ *Provincial Elections Act Amendments Act, 1949*, S.B.C. 1949, c. 19.



WHITE

NO 1
ORIENTALS
INDIANS

LUNCH

Discrimination was commonplace in pre-World War Two Vancouver. Asians and Black people were barred from establishments like the White Lunch Cafeteria restaurant chain, which opened in 1913. The name was derived from its policy of serving and hiring only white people. Indigenous, Black people and Asians faced various forms of discrimination in places like theatres and public swimming pools, with restricted hours or seating areas. Some Asian restaurants on the other hand, became well known as safe spaces for Indigenous and racialized people.

Illustration by John Endo Greenaway, background photo, White Lunch Ltd. No. 4, 806 Granville St. Vancouver, B.C. 8.3.'18, CVA 99-5167.



Not all communities in BC were European – the village of Paldi on Vancouver Island was home to a multiracial community as illustrated by the children attending the Mayo school there in 1934. Photo courtesy of Tomoko Okada.

“BRITISH COLUMBIA”? RESILIENT COMMUNITIES: SOUTH ASIAN AND BEYOND

After union with Canada, Indigenous peoples strove to survive and surmount the provincial and federal government's assault on their communities through dispossession of their lands and the abuses associated with residential schools. Many Black people left the province in the face of everyday racism and those that remained faced and overcame innumerable barriers. Many Chinese miners who had entered the province in the 1850s left in the face of ongoing discrimination.

Chinese newcomers in particular faced an onslaught of racist legislation that accelerated as the province moved to block all immigration from Asia while providing substantial assistance to settlers from Britain and Europe. The goal, pronounced on many occasions, was a “White British Columbia.” Survival depended on families and communities relying on one another. Only strong community bonds allowed Indigenous peoples and racialized communities to transcend the challenges.

In 1878, the provincial legislature passed legislation to tax the Chinese living in BC at \$40 per year (a breathing tax). Chinese workers and merchants responded by going on strike that September: “Ladies are doing their own kitchen and housework, restaurant and hotel-keepers their own cooking, heads of families are sawing their own wood and blacking their own boots.”¹ A leading merchant, Tai Sing, and eleven others sued the government.² The BC Supreme Court ruled that only the federal government could pass such an act and the tax was struck down.

The building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, part of the Terms of Union, was largely subsidized by the federal government and received huge swaths of Indigenous land without consulting First Nations. The CPR also required a large number of labourers, and Chinese workers came to fill the gap. They often were employed on the most dangerous jobs and an estimated 600 or more Chinese labourers perished in the process. Their reward? To be laid off without notice, left to fend for themselves in difficult terrain, and then largely erased from the history of the CPR.³

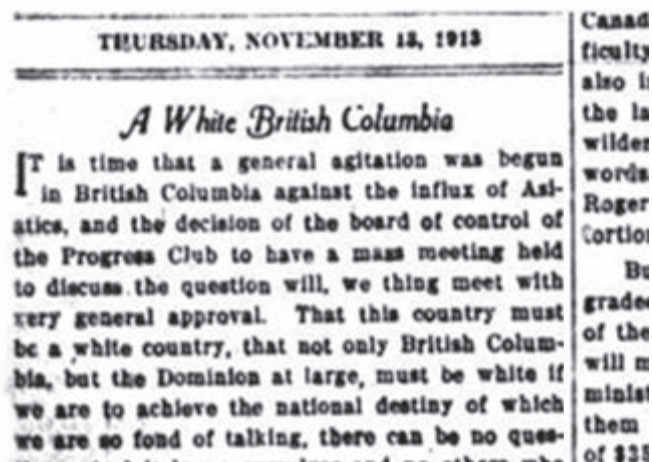
The provincial government hounded the Chinese in the province, passing legislation in 1884 prohibiting Chinese individuals from pre-empting land. The provincial government adopted more than 200 legislative instruments that discriminated, first against the Chinese, and later against Japanese and South Asian residents.⁴

IMMIGRATION

The first Japanese settlers arrived in British Columbia a few years after union with Canada, and South Asians, largely from the Punjab, began arriving at the turn of the century.⁵

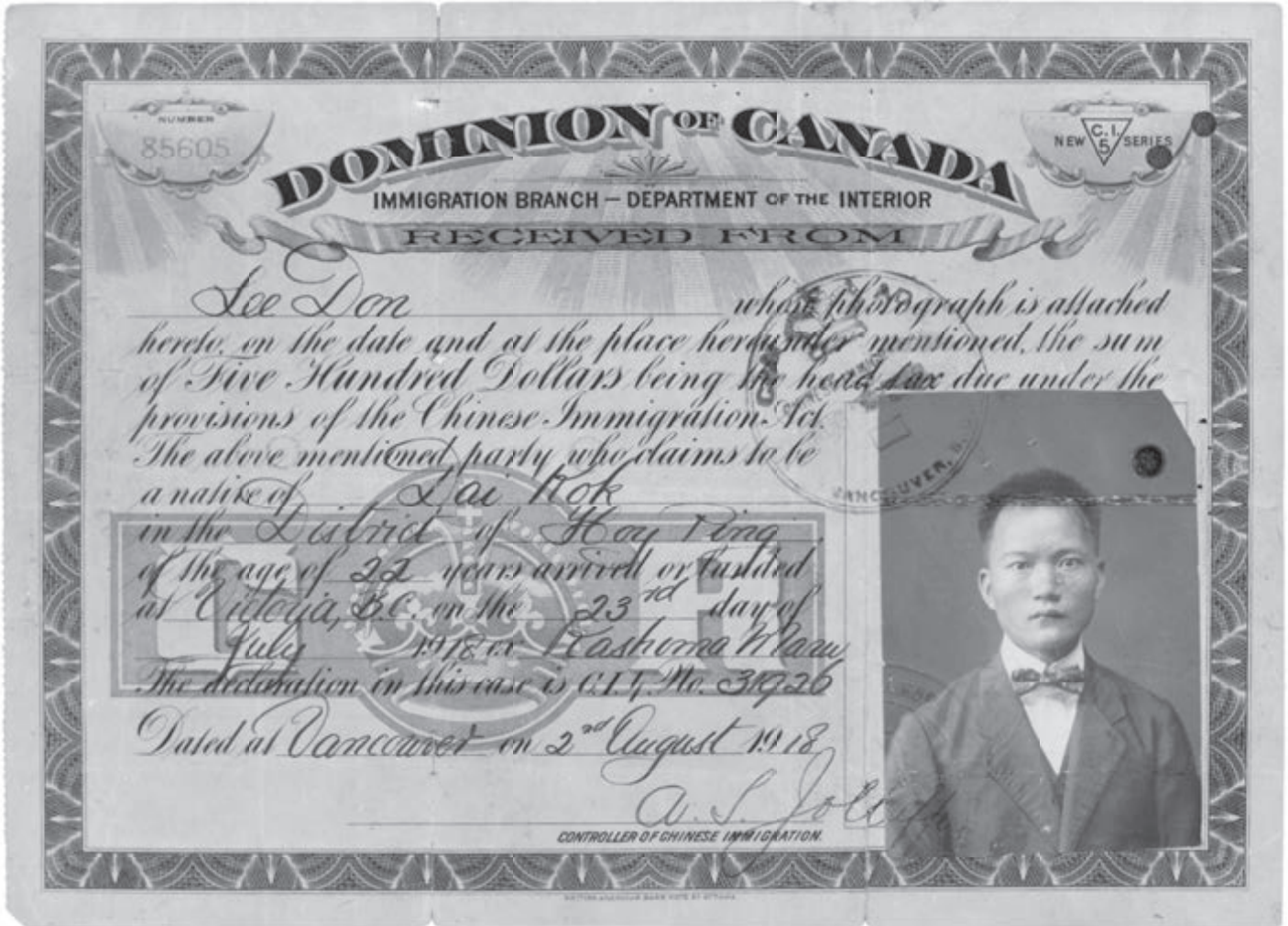
■ The Vancouver Sun “A White British Columbia”

The Vancouver Sun had a long history of not only reporting racism but also promoting it among its readers. Actions such as theirs were instrumental in fomenting hatred against Indigenous peoples as well as those from Asia. That record has not been adequately addressed to date.



Vancouver Sun, 1913

The BC legislature continuously demanded control over immigration, passing its own British Columbia Immigration Acts ten times between 1884 and 1908 to stop immigration from Asia. Such acts were vetoed by the federal government, which viewed immigration as its exclusive prerogative. In Victoria, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association came together in 1884, largely to protest the provincial government's



Lee Don paid \$500 in 1918 to enter Canada as illustrated by this head tax certificate. The provincial government demanded the restriction of Chinese immigration in 1884 onwards until the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited immigration. "Certificate - Chinese Immigration Act, From C to C - Chinese Canadian Stories of Migration," licensed with CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

attempt to introduce An Act to Prevent the Immigration of Chinese, 1884-1885. In response, the federal government convened the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration that held hearings in BC beginning in 1884. On the first day, the head of this commission explained why such a commission was established: "British Columbia has repeatedly by her Legislature, as well as by her representatives in Parliament, solicited the Executive and Parliament of Canada to enact a law prohibiting the incoming of Chinese to British Columbia."⁶ Though convened by the federal government, the Royal Commission was a response to the tide of white supremacy in the province. Not surprisingly it recommended the discriminatory \$50 head tax on Chinese immigrants, a proposal adopted and legislated by the federal government in 1885 once the CPR was completed and Chinese workers were considered dispensable.⁷ Often left destitute when the CPR was completed, many survived only because they received support from Indigenous communities and in

some cases Chinese men developed relationships with Indigenous women.⁸

► **VIDEO LINK** Cedar and Bamboo | www.cchsbcc.ca/cedar--bamboo/⁹

All Our Father's Relations (trailer only) | allourfathersrelations.com/trailers

From C to C - Chinese Canadian Stories of Migration | bit.ly/370eoSd

Working with federal officials, the BC government first favoured British immigration, providing settlers and corporations with access to Indigenous lands and resources. Later, the search for white settlers expanded, embracing first those from northern Europe (Swedes, Finns, Germans, and others), then southern Europe (Italians and Greeks), and finally Eastern Europeans. These latter groups often faced discrimination in an Anglo-dominated society. The legal and institutional



Wreckage on Vancouver's Powell Street after violent anti-Asian riot on September 7, 1907. UBC Special Collections JPCP.36.017.

targeting of Asian immigrants, however, took matters to an exceptional level.

For example, complaints from the BC government about Asian immigrants drove the federal government to again sponsor another investigation, this time a Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration that reported in 1902.¹⁰ The Commission again recommended an increase in the Chinese head tax to \$500 per person, an extraordinary amount in those days. The BC government received over twenty-three million in revenue from this source alone. Only in 2014 did the BC government finally respond to demands for redress spearheaded by activist organizations such as the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) and Head Tax Families Society of Canada.

Chinese and Japanese settlers continued to cross the Pacific to BC, prompting the provincial government to again introduce new legislation, the British Columbia Immigration Act in 1898. This legislation was modelled on the racist Natal Act in southern Africa and had its origins in "Jim Crow" legislation in Mississippi that prevented people of African descent from voting by imposing literacy tests or other prohibitive requirements. Introduced eight times in the BC legislature, it was generally disallowed except in 1907. With the legislation allowed to stand, BC-based immigration officials imposed language tests on newcomers arriving in BC and two Japanese men, Nakane and Okazake, were detained. They filed and won a legal challenge to the provincial government legislation.¹²

■ **Gim Wong's Motorcycle Ride for Redress**
In 2005, World War II veteran Gim Wong rode his motorcycle across Canada at the age of 82 to fight for redress on behalf of Chinese Head Tax-payer families. The journey became known as the Gim Wong's Ride for Redress.¹¹

By this time, however, government policies had reinforced popular anti-Asian racism. In September 1907, Chinese and Japanese communities rose in protest when white rioters in Vancouver attacked Chinatown and the Japanese Canadian community on Powell Street. During the anti-Asian Vancouver riot, the Chinese community initially took shelter from the rioters but many purchased rifles to defend themselves and a three-day protest strike ensued. In Powell Street, the heart of the Japanese Canadian community, residents repelled the rioters after being alerted to their arrival.

► **VIDEO LINK** Gim Wong's 2005 Ride for Redress | vimeo.com/461527211

Inquiries into the riot, convened in 1907 by future prime minister Mackenzie King, ended up blaming the victims. His inquiries, furthermore, led the government to impose new immigration restrictions directed against newcomers from Japan and from India.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** Pivotal Voices: Exploring Identity, Inclusion and Citizenship: The 1907 Vancouver Riots, available at | bit.ly/2JgJexf

In the case of Japan, federal representatives went to Japan and pressured the Japanese government to limit immigration to 400 labourers per year. In the case of India, the government amended the Immigration Act to “prohibit the landing in Canada of any specified class of immigrants or of any immigrants who have to Canada otherwise than by continuous journey from the country of which they are natives or citizens and upon through tickets purchased in that country.”¹³ This legislation, demanded by the provincial government, barred not only Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian newcomers, it also prohibited the entry of Filipinos and most others. The federal government then introduced similar restrictions to bar the entry of Black people to Canada in 1911.

■ **Husain Rahim**

Husain Rahim, along with many others, protested the continuous journey regulation, adopted in 1908 as a way of stopping immigration from India. In 1913, passengers aboard the Panama Maru responded to attempts to stop them from landing in Victoria by taking the government to court. Members from the Victoria Topaz Street Sikh temple (gurdwara) publicly protested with Rahim. The lawyer, J. Edward Bird, successfully argued their case in court. Fifty-five newcomers from India entered the country. The provincial and federal governments panicked, introducing a blanket ban on Asian immigration to BC.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey | komagatamarujourney.ca

On May 23, 1914, the SS Komagata Maru arrived in Vancouver with 376 passengers. The government denied them entry to Canada, and they had to remain on board for two months before being forced to leave under armed escort. In the left foreground is the ship sponsor, Gurdit Singh and his son Balwant. Vancouver Public Library 6231 PNG.

When Gurdit Singh chartered the *Komagata Maru* the following year, the government refused to allow these British subjects – 337 Sikhs, 27 Muslims and 12 Hindus – even to land, holding them onboard for two months.¹⁴

While the main-street press published headlines about a “Hindu Invasion,” the Khalsa Diwan Society and the Shore Committee mobilized in gurdwaras across the province to support the passengers trapped by the authorities. Hundreds turned out for a public meeting in June to support the movement demanding that the passengers be landed, including over 100 members of the Socialist Party of Canada.¹⁵ The Canadian naval vessel *The Rainbow* trained its guns on the vessel, forcing it from the harbour. British authorities met the ship upon its return, provoking a confrontation and killing 20 of the passengers. These events, the rising anti-colonial movement in India, supported by the



Husain Rahim (centre with hat) and members of Sikh community in front of Victoria’s detention centre, 1913. Kohaly Collection, Special Collections, Simon Fraser University Library.





Paldi was one of the centres of the South Asian community in BC. Here women and children gather near the home of Mayo Singh, circa 1938. Courtesy of Tomoko Okada.

newly formed Ghadar Party in the Pacific Northwest, led many activists in South Asian communities in North America to depart for India.¹⁶ The community was reduced to only a few thousand people after the war.

Communities suffered from these harsh immigration regulations that often divided families. Women were particularly hard hit, either left behind in their home countries or forced to carry the double burden of work and family.

Hogan's Alley in Vancouver was a strategic centre of the Black communities in British Columbia.



Hogan's Alley, 1958. City of Vancouver Archives.

■ LITERARY MOMENT

The sense of loss and longing of separated partners is captured in this poem by Kuldip Gill (1934–2009), part of the exhibit *(DIS) enfranchisement* held at the Gur Sikh Temple, Sikh Heritage Museum, Abbotsford, in 2017.

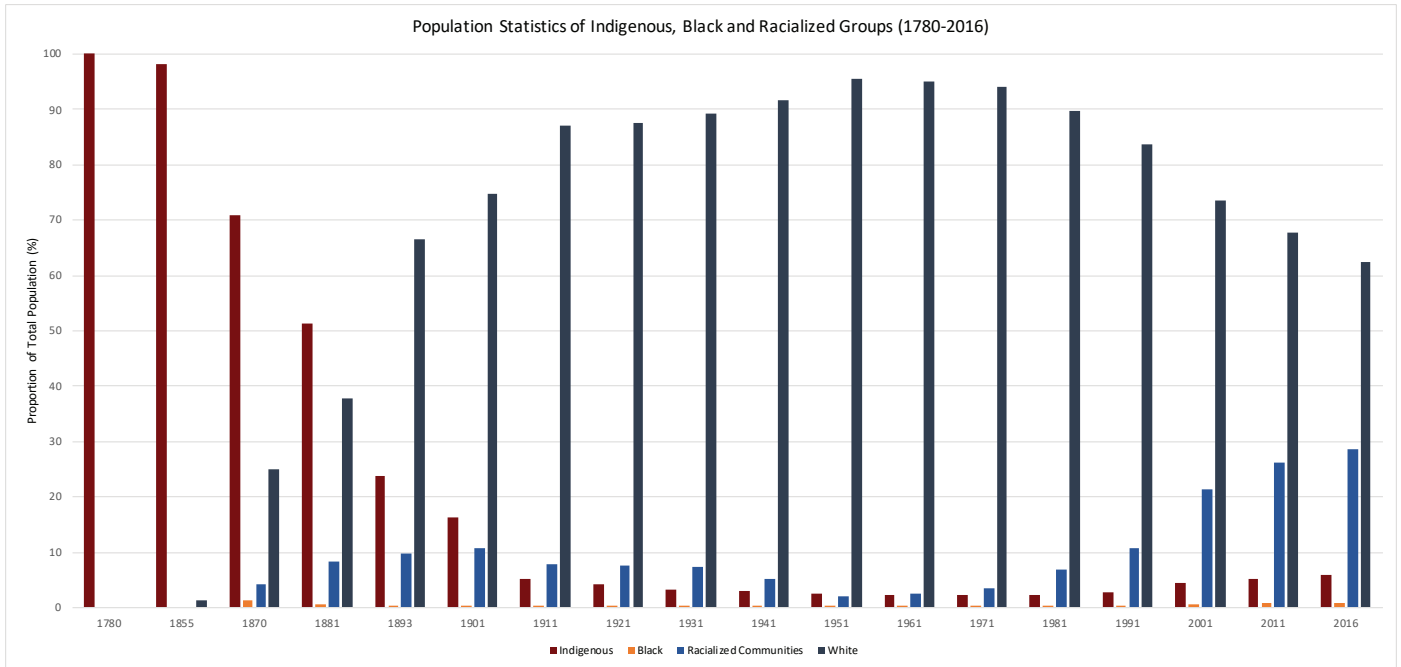
Can I live this love, matching you to poetry
In Urdu, Gurmukhi and Hindi,
And have as reply only your few unlettered
Lines telling me that our children are well,
Relating my mother's love and brother's wife's whine?

I wait. No letters. Not even paper-love rewards.
Chained to pulling green lumber all night, dragged
Through black sleepless nights, thoughts of
Your long green eyes, your face, blaze my mind.
My children's voices cry/laugh through my dreams.
Enfeebled by endless greenchain shifts, I fear
A war, the years.

No passports yet? Fathom my heart's great dukh. I watch.
Droves of birds fly away together, another winter.
Come before the war, come through Hong Kong and Yokohama.
Please let me know as soon as you can.
And I will send money to Moga
To bring you, the children, across the
The kala pani to Victoria.

Come soon. Before the war.
I'll tell you what you need to bring:
Sweaters for the children, books,
Seeds, are hard to get. Bring yourself. Yourself,
And surma for your beautiful green eyes.

I am your beloved Inderpal Singh,
Who would spread flower petals for you,
And fly to you on feathers, if I could.



Graph by J. Price/Michelle Cox based on data from Statistics Canada; the BC Black History Awareness Society; Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West* (p. 429) and other published sources.

In the aftermath of World War I, racist groups in BC, including the Victoria Chamber of Commerce’s committee on “Oriental Aggression” and the Asiatic Exclusion League, re-established with the support of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, exerted further pressure on the federal government to restrict Asian immigration. Groups such as the Chinese Labour Association, the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver, the Chinese Canadian Association of Victoria, and community organizations from across Canada came together in the Chinese Association of Canada (T.C. Mark, president) to counter the racist campaign, sending a delegation to Ottawa to submit proposals for a more just immigration policy, to no avail.¹⁷ In 1923, the government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, replacing the head tax with a blanket ban on Chinese workers immigrating to Canada. Coming into effect on July 1, 1923, Chinese communities refused to celebrate Dominion Day, labelling it “humiliation day,” with businesses and communities shuttering their doors for the day.

In 1923 and 1928, further limits were placed on immigration from Japan. The only concession won in this period was a decision taken at the 1918 Imperial War Conference in London whereby the British dominions agreed to allow the wives and minor children of Indian men in Canada to enter, but only on ministerial permit, a small concession made out of fear for the growing independence movement in India at the time.¹⁸

Campaigns to support the war effort during World War II and the involvement of Asian Canadians in the armed forces opened cracks in the wall of white supremacy. With the war’s end, communities once again mobilized, resulting, in the case of the Chinese Canadian community, in the abolition of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1947.

However, racist immigration policies were still firmly entrenched as illustrated by the contrasting levels of support for postwar resettlement of Europeans versus those from Asia.¹⁹

Origins of Immigrants Arriving in Canada, 1946-1953								
	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953
European	71,410	63,627	124,916	93,969	71,714	190,958	161,333	166,037
‘Other’	309	500	498	1,248	2,198	3,433	3,165	2,831
TOTAL	71,719	64,127	125,414	95,217	73,912	194,391	164,498	168,868

Source: *Canada Year Book* (Ottawa, Dominion Bureau of Statistics), Volumes 1948-1955.



Ruth Lor of the Chinese Canadian Association and Muriel Kitagawa of the National Japanese Canadian Citizens Association flank Eileen Fairclough, Minister of Immigration (centre), during lobbying effort, 1963. Library and Archives Canada, PA-117803.

The 1952 Immigration Act maintained the bias of previous years and discriminatory quotas were imposed on immigrants from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and other areas of the world. Organizations such as the Negro Citizenship Association, the Khalsa Diwan Association, the Chinese Canadian Association, and the Japanese Canadian Citizens Association protested the continuing restrictions on immigration.

■ Ruth Lor and Muriel Kitagawa

In 1963, Ruth Lor of the Chinese Canadian Association and Muriel Kitagawa of the National Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association worked together to end the racist immigration laws. Relations between Chinese and Japanese Canadians had been difficult during the war but afterward community leaders made efforts to reconcile and work together.

A family reunification program allowed a very few to enter from China but in 1960 the government launched a witch hunt for so-called illegal Chinese immigrants, a measure opposed by many in the Chinese Canadian community, including Douglas Jung, the first Chinese Canadian MP, and community leader, Wong Foon Sien.

Pressure for change also arose from the 1963 adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination as well as from criticism of Canadian racist policies from the leaders of Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. Racialized communities, with support from allies and court cases, finally forced regulatory and policy changes that began to end the

Eurocentric immigration and refugee policies that had dominated for nearly a century. The impact would be felt over the next fifty years as the demographics of BC shifted and increasing numbers of newcomers from Asia, including Filipinos, Koreans, and many from Southeast Asia and Persia, joined African and Hispanic Americans in coming to the province.

■ LITERARY MOMENT

Arriving and settling on distant lands can be hard, as captured in this 1969 poem by Florence Chia-Ying Yeh.

Alien Land (Vancouver, Fall 1969)

Frost descends on this alien land again –
the trees are all red;
adrift I am

even more than a year before
My original plan didn't work out –
it's difficult to explain – and now I'm like
a lone pillar trying to support
a house on a precarious slant

Do what you're told –
to make a living swallow your pride –
beseeching strangers to give you shelter
leaves a sour taste I know

Before I came,
The fortune teller had told me so:
that I'd go to the end of the earth
and weep by the shore.²⁰

Despite ongoing changes to immigration laws and regulation, the impact of the “whites only” immigration policies would endure. Systemic racism remained part of the provincial makeup, as illustrated by the outlandish reactions to the arrival of 600 undocumented Fujian migrants on BC’s shores in 1999,²¹ as well as to the Sri Lankan (Tamil) refugees that arrived in 2010.²² Today, domestic workers, undocumented workers, temporary foreign workers, and refugees continue to carry the burden of exclusion.

CULTURAL RESILIENCE VS. EVERYDAY RACISM

Family ties, food, and cultural bonds allowed racialized peoples to create communities that were essential for surviving everyday racism and white supremacy.



Marry Harry, Nora Wilson, Eva Wilson, and Louise Henshall at Redona Bay Cannery in 1942. Museum at Campbell River, 008386.

Indigenous, Black and racialized people living in Canada have many identities, come from diverse backgrounds, work in many occupations, embrace various sexual orientations, and have a variety of family and community ties. This also held true in the past, though discriminatory legislation often proscribed where people could work. First Nations, Black, and Asian Canadians were hardworking people, whether homemakers or hunters, restaurateurs or domestics, cannery workers or fishers, lumber workers or market gardeners.²³ Many became active in the labour movement, including the famed Vancouver Longshoremen Local 256 composed mainly of Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish members formed in 1906.²⁴



Japanese Canadian fallers, Hillcrest Lumber - Sahtlam, Vancouver Island, circa 1940. Kaatza Station Museum, Wilmer Gold Collection.

Asian Canadians: Cheap Labour?

Asian Canadian workers have often been labelled as “cheap labour” and “strikebreakers”, but what was the reality?

“It is said that in 1919 the IWW [International Workers of the World] had as many Chinese as white members. The Chinese and whites went thru one very successful strike in the lumber mills together during this year at which time they got a very satisfactory increase in wages. In the next strike some unorganized whites walked in and took the jobs of the Chinese, since which time they have retired from the I.W.W. hall to the Chinese Labor Association on Pender St.”²⁵

Many miners gave up their lives in the coalmines of Cumberland on Vancouver Island. The mortality statistics from the Cumberland Museum reveal the proportionately higher toll that Asian Canadian miners paid in explosions in the Dunsmuir mines, yet their sacrifice is seldom acknowledged:

- 1901 | No. 6 Mine: 64 dead (35 Chinese, 9 Japanese, 20 White)
- 1903 | No. 6 Mine: 15 dead (all Chinese)
- 1922 | No. 4 Mine: 18 dead (9 Chinese, 6 Japanese, 3 White)
- 1923 | No. 4 Mine: 35 dead (19 Chinese, 14 White)

Japanese Canadian workers were often excluded from mainstream unions so in 1920 they formed the Japanese Labour Union led by Etsu Suzuki. It later became the Camp and Mill Workers Union.

Chinese Canadians also organized across the Pacific, establishing the Chinese Empire Reform Association and an affiliated Chinese Empire Ladies' Reform Association in Victoria in the early 1900s. Helping China become stronger was seen as a way to obtaining rights in Canada.

Diverse Nations and Asian Canadian communities each maintained cultural bonds and practices that allowed them to survive in the face of adversity. There were also examples of cross-community bonds of solidarity.



Grand opening of the Chinese Public School at 636 Fisgard Street on August 7, 1909. City of Victoria Archives M06930.

For Asian Canadians, cultural renewal took place through community language schools such as Lequn Yishu, a free public school in Victoria sponsored by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, or through private tutoring. The Japanese Language School in Vancouver was an important cultural centre and dozens of other Japanese language schools operated in Cumberland, Royston, Nanaimo, Chemainus, and elsewhere.

■ Khalsa Diwan Society

The Khalsa Diwan Society, founded on July 22, 1906, in Vancouver, brought together Sikh newcomers to build the first Canadian gurdwara (meaning “doorway/pathway to the guru”) at 1866 West 2nd in Vancouver. Because the population of South Asians of diverse backgrounds was minimal at the time, the gurdwara served as a safe space for activists, Hindus, and Muslims, in addition to Sikhs.

In Paldi, near Duncan, BC, workers from varied cultural backgrounds, including Chinese, Japanese, European, and South Asians, lived and worked together. The children played and went to school together regardless of ethnicity. Each group preserved their traditions through worship, ceremony, and social events.

People shared food traditions in ceremony and in everyday occurrences. Chinese restaurants such as the Nam King Low in Nanaimo, and Chow's Grocery in Duncan often welcomed First Nations peoples when white establishments would not serve them. When the roasting oven was operating in Cumberland, Chinese and Japanese community members eagerly awaited the freshly barbecued meats. The prevalence of Chinese chop suey houses is a testament to the familiarity of “Chinese cuisine” to one and all. The proximity of Chinese and Japanese “towns” led to adaptation of foods. Japanese Canadians who lived in Cumberland before being uprooted took with them the recipe and the memory of “Cumberland Chow Mein.” It can still be found in the cookbooks of the Kamloops Japanese Canadian Association and Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto.²⁶

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** *Eating Stories: A Chinese Canadian & Aboriginal Potluck* (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC, 2014)



Families on the steps of the Khalsa Diwan Society gurdwara on 2nd Ave., Vancouver, 1920. Simon Fraser University Archives, ASC_0025-0001.

Changes to the Indian Act in 1927 led to the dissolution of the Allied Tribes. Ongoing immigration exclusions, described above, caused great distress among racialized communities as their numbers declined. Resistance went underground to some degree, but changes were also afoot. First Nations reorganized under the umbrella of the Native Brotherhood, and young Asian Canadians came together in the BC Youth Council.

Special ties developed between communities that faced discrimination on an everyday basis. Today, organizations such as the Pacific Canada Heritage Centre – Museum of Migration, Hogan’s Alley Society, the Vancouver Japanese Language School and Japanese Hall and many other cultural groups are coming together in the Cross Cultural Strathcona Walking Tour project to gather and share the rich, multi-layered history of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside neighbourhoods.

■ **Joan Morris**

Songhees Elder Joan Morris, speaking at the Robert Bateman Centre on November 7, 2016, said: “We bartered for seaweed, sea urchins, got big sacks of rice, whatever we didn’t have – baking powder, sugar, coffee, we exchanged for what you have. There used to be old Royal Café, my grandma, my selsila, would get a big platter of fried rice for a quarter, my great-grandma liked lemon pie ... there was a shop on this side of the Royal Café, it was the Bluebird Cabs, there were two men there, very fine old men – Sam and Joe. My grandma liked dealing with Sam, he was an older guy, very gentle ... In the back, my popii, the late Robert Sam, a lot of guys they skipped, eh, they went there for the pool, all of the boys went there for the pool, that was their hangout ...Why did we go there? It was because of such camaraderie between the Chinese nation and ours, plus you knew what you were getting for food.”

■ **Vivian Jung**

Vivian Jung’s experience of being denied entry to Crystal Pool in 1945 speaks to a common daily occurrence of exclusion that many Chinese, Black, and other racialized people faced in public spaces. A teacher in training at the time, she and her classmates went to the pool for lifesaver training as part of their program, but Vivian was denied entry. Her instructor and classmates protested the unfair treatment until the colour bar at this public pool fell. Vivian went on to obtain her lifesaving and teaching credentials and later became the Vancouver School Board’s first Chinese Canadian teacher.²⁷



Japanese Canadian, Chinese Canadian, South Asian, and European youth gather for photo at provincial youth congress, 1940. John Bong, *New Canadian*.



Songhees Elder Joan Morris, speaking at Robert Bateman Centre, November , 2016. Photo by Jeff Tanaka.



Vivian Jung. Photo courtesy Cynthia Kent.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "On Trial," *The Daily Colonist*, September 18, 1878, 2.
- ² *Tai Sing v. Maguire* (1878), 1 BCR Pt. 1 101 (SC), accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/3hyWyK7
- ³ *The Ties That Bind: Building the CPR, Building a Place in Canada*, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/2L4udPE
- ⁴ For a government-compiled list of discriminatory legislation, see Canada, British Columbia, *Discriminatory Legislation in British Columbia, 1872–1848*, accessed May 30, 2017, bit.ly/34UWEqq
- ⁵ On early arrivals from South Asia, see Sikh Heritage Museum, canadiansikhheritage.ca/. See also South Asian Canadian Historical Sites, bit.ly/3hqjtHz
- ⁶ Canada. *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration: Report and Evidence* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, 1885), vii.
- ⁷ Lily Siewsan Chow, *Blood and Sweat over the Railway Tracks* (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC and UBC INSTRCC, 2014).
- ⁸ See Jean Barman, "Beyond Chinatown: Chinese Men and Indigenous Women in Early British Columbia," *BC Studies* 177 (Spring 2013): 39–64; and Lily Chow, *Blossoms in the Gold Mountains* (Prince George, BC: Caitlin Press, 2018).
- ⁹ See also Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC, *Cedar and Bamboo*, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lo19r8vQOQ8>; and Alejandro Yoshizawa and Sarah Ling, *All Our Father's Relations*, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/3mYxZr1
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- ¹¹ Gim Wong's 2005 Ride for Redress, December 15, 2020, vimeo.com/461527211
- ¹² See the court decision in *Re Nakane and Okazake* (1908), 13 BCR 370 (SC), accessed June 9, 2017, bit.ly/3hspd3l. See also *Bamboo Shoots: Chinese Canadian Legacies in BC*, accessed December 15, 2020, www.openschool.bc.ca/bambooshoots
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- ¹⁴ *Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey*, accessed December 15, 2020, komagatamarujourney.ca
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- ²⁰ Florence Chia-Ying Yeh, *Ode to the Lotus* (Vancouver: SUCCESS, 2007), 79.
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- ²² See David Moffette and Nevena Aksin, "Fighting Human Smuggling or Criminalizing Refugees? Regimes of Justification in and around R v Appulonappa," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 33, no. 1 (2018): 21–39.
- ²³ Rod Mickleburgh, *On the Line: A History of the British Columbia Labour Movement* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2018), includes much more material on Indigenous, Black, and Asian Canadian labour than any such work in the past.
- ²⁴ Mickleburgh, *On the Line*, 41.
- ²⁵ "Testimonial Meeting on the Oriental," IWW Hall, Cordova Street, March 4, 1924, Survey on Race Relations (Box/Folder 24, Interview 16), 4.
- ²⁶ *Eating Stories: A Chinese Canadian and Aboriginal Potluck* (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC, 2014).
- ²⁷ Henry Yu, *Journeys of Hope: Challenging Discrimination and Building on Vancouver Chinatown's Legacies* (Vancouver: WePress, 2018), x.



Confronting Racism with Solidarity: An Analysis of the 2020 HSA Workplace Survey

The Health Science Association, a provincial union of health care professionals, last year took the initiative to survey its members from Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities about racial harassment, discrimination, and workplace culture. It also asked them about their experiences with the union to determine how the union could improve its work and deepen its commitment to racial justice in the workplace and beyond. The fascinating and instructive results of this important initiative have been published recently in *Confronting Racism With Solidarity: An Analysis of the 2020 HSA Workplace Survey*.



Having incarcerated the majority of Japanese Canadians in internment camps in the interior of BC, the government refused to take responsibility for educating school-age children, leaving it up to church groups and the internees themselves to set up makeshift schools. Many of the teachers were hastily trained community members, but there were also a number of non-Japanese Canadian teachers who took up the challenge. This photo shows kindergarten students and their teachers at the Bay Farm camp in June, 1944. NNM 1994.64.9.2.

“BRITISH COLUMBIA”? THE ATTEMPTED ETHNIC CLEANSING OF JAPANESE CANADIANS

Anti-Asian racism in British Columbia culminated during World War II in the uprooting, dispossession, and exile of Japanese Canadians, one of the gravest episodes in BC's and Canada's history. The successive punitive measures taken against the 21,000 Japanese Canadians, measures that continued for four years after the war, transcending the injustices to Japanese Americans, were not just a human rights abuse – they constituted an attempt to ethnically cleanse the province of those of Japanese heritage.

■ Definition: Ethnic Cleansing

A United Nations Commission defined ethnic cleansing as “a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.” The coercive practices used to remove the civilian population can include “murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, severe physical injury to civilians, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, use of civilians as human shields, destruction of property, robbery of personal property, attacks on hospitals, medical personnel, and locations with the Red Cross / Red Crescent emblem, among others.”¹

The federal government was responsible for most of the laws behind this tragedy, but the real perpetrators were those in BC who manipulated war fears to demand the uprooting and pushed for the permanent expulsion of Japanese Canadians from the province, as well as those who let it happen.² For too long, silence has shrouded the fact that thousands took advantage of the dispossession for personal gain. A reckoning is long overdue.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** Teacher resource guides on Japanese Canadian History available on-line at japanesecanadianhistory.net

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** The New Canadian online (see note 3)

Japanese Canadians had been in Canada for more than 70 years; two-thirds were citizens contributing enormously to the province. Yet, like other Asian Canadians, they continued to face prejudice and discrimination. In response, young Japanese Canadians organized the Japanese Canadian Citizens' League and began publishing the English-language newspaper *The New Canadian*.



New Canadian staff, Kaslo 1943. Langham Cultural Society.

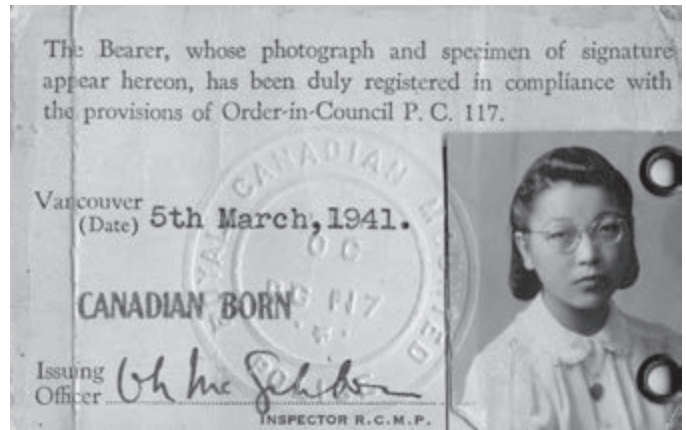
■ The New Canadian newspaper staff, Kaslo 1943

“At no other time in the life of the second generation, when hostile voices rise in sharp crescendo, has there been a greater need for some medium through which the Nisei might speak his thoughts and his hopes to the Canadian public at large,” declared the editors of *The New Canadian* in its third issue, published February 1, 1939. “To the future greatness of Canada and the part of the Canadian-born Japanese in this future we pledge our sincere effort and our endeavor.” The situation to which they referred was the growing distrust of Japan and Japanese immigrants during the tense months preceding the outbreak of World War II. Published from 1939 to 2001, first in Vancouver, then in Kaslo, BC, then in Winnipeg, and finally in Toronto, the newspaper follows the path of Japanese Canadians during their eviction from the West Coast and their detention in a series of facilities in BC's Interior and the Prairies.³

However, the Pacific War that began with Japan's invasion of China in 1937 inflamed tensions, particularly between Chinese and Japanese Canadian communities. When Canada declared war against Japan after Pearl Harbor, some influential racists, including Hilda Glynn-Ward and Sidney D'Esterre of Comox, called for Japanese Canadians to be rounded up. But some opposed such measures.

The first-wave feminist Nellie McClung had begun to work with Japanese Canadian writers in the 1930s and defended them: "Canadian Japanese are not to blame for the treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor ...We must have precautions, but not persecutions."⁴ Muriel Kitagawa, a writer for *The New Canadian* recorded: "The majority of the people are decent and fair-minded and they say so in letters and editorials."⁵

Immediately after Canada declared war on Japan, Ottawa passed regulations that required all Japanese citizens and anyone naturalized after 1922 to report to the Registrar of Enemy Aliens. Further measures included the arrest and internment of 38 Japanese designated potential threats to national security, the impounding of nearly 1,200 fishing boats operated by Japanese Canadians (including the *Soyokaze* owned by Shigekazu Matsunaga on Quadra Island⁶), and the shuttering of three Japanese-language newspapers, even though one, *Nikkan Minshu* (Daily People), had been critical of Japanese imperialism. S.J. Willis, BC superintendent of education, ordered all Japanese language schools shut down on authority of the Council of Public Education, a provincial agency.⁷



Beginning in 1941, everyone of Japanese ancestry over 16 years of age was fingerprinted and photographed for a registration card that had to be shown on demand. Japanese nationals were given yellow cards, naturalized Canadians were given pink cards, and Canadian-born citizens were given white cards. NNM 2011.16.5.1.

But worse was to come. The BC government would play a key role in pushing the federal government to persecute Japanese Canadians.⁸ BC premier at the time, John Hart, head of the newly formed Liberal-Conservative coalition, initiated the move to uproot: "When Attorney-General Maitland and I were in Ottawa before Christmas [1941], the seriousness of the Japanese problem was discussed with federal authorities, and officials were urged to remove the menace of Fifth Column activity."⁹ Then BC cabinet minister George S. Pearson led a delegation to Ottawa that lobbied strenuously for the forcible removal of Japanese Canadians. Opposition from Lt. Gen. Maurice Pope and other federal officials led Pearson to declare that the BC government would not be supportive of federal policies. It was an ugly confrontation.¹⁰

Some people, including Laura Jamieson of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), spoke out



Confiscated Japanese Canadian fishing boats. NNM 2010-4-2-1-11a.



After returning to the coast, Shigekazu Matsunaga eventually found and bought back his beloved 36-foot, double-ender *Soyokaze* (Gentle Wind) that had been seized and sold during the war. It now sits as a featured outdoor exhibit at the Museum at Campbell River. Museum at Campbell River.



Grace MacInnis, Victoria Daily Times, 1942.

publicly against racism directed at Japanese Canadians. In the provincial legislature, Grace MacInnis, the newly elected CCF representative for Vancouver-Burrard, made her inaugural speech, declaring that people were “completely deaf to the cries of race hatred that are now going up.”¹¹ She emphasized that the CCF had “no intention of lending ourselves to this system of race hatreds, or any other Nazi-inspired hatreds.”

But a campaign of vilification by racist ideologues, abetted by the BC government and federal MPs (including Howard Green, A.W. Neill, and Robert Mayhew) effectively played on war fears. Voices of anti-racist dissent were largely silenced and soon even CCF leader Harold Winch turned on the community, joining premier John Hart to demand the forced removal of Japanese Canadians.¹² On February 24, 1942, the federal government used the War Measures Act to pass Order-in-Council P.C. 1486 empowering the government to round up and detain all Japanese Canadians. It was a fateful day as the voices of hate received the blessing of the state. Too many in BC had joined the racist campaign or had become silent, complicit bystanders.

Japanese Canadians resented being subjected to such treatment but, faced with the power of the state, many felt that all they could do was endure and keep their families intact. To survive was in fact a form of resistance, nurturing family and friends so that they could fight another day. However, as thousands were forced to leave their homes on the Coast and be detained in terrible conditions at Hastings Park,¹³ organized opposition grew.

Children’s dining room in former livestock building at Hastings Park. NNM 1994.69.3.16.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** Hastings Park 1942 | hastingspark1942.ca

► **PRIMARY SOURCE** Nikkei Images records the stories of Japanese Canadians in their own words | centre.nikkeiplace.org/research/nikkei-images

The agency in charge of rounding up and detaining Japanese Canadian was the BC Security Commission, a federal agency with an advisory group that included Minister of Labour George S. Pearson and CCF leader Harold Winch. This powerful commission made the fateful decision to split men from their families and send them to road camps. This led to an outcry. Muriel Kitagawa, a poet and journalist, recalled how her friend and colleague Eiko Henmi reacted to the events while being detained in Hastings Park:

The night the first bunch of Nisei were supposed to go to Schreiber and they wouldn’t, the women and children at the [Hastings] pool milled around in front of their cage, and one very handsome Mountie came with his truncheon and started to hit them, yelling at them, “Get the hell back in there.” Eiko’s [Henmi] blood boiled over. She strode over to him and shouted at him: “You put that stick down! What do you think you’re doing? Do you think these women and children are so many cows that you can beat them back into their place?” Eiko was shaking mad and raked him with fighting words.¹⁴

The activists openly defied authorities leading to arrests, detention, and an uprising at the Vancouver Immigration Building. Those who resisted were arrested and many were interned, illegally, in prisoner-of-war camps, including Camp 101 in Angler, Ontario.¹⁵

More than 21,000 people had been forced from their homes and put in detention camps in the interior of BC, sent to other sites to perform forced labour, or otherwise detained. The BC government had not only precipitated the uprooting, but it also authorized its BC Provincial Police to participate in the round-up and in the policing of the detention camps and towns.



In order to keep families together, Harold Hirose, a former organizer of the Surrey Berry Co-op Association, organized a group of 200 Japanese Canadian farmers from the Fraser Valley to work on farms for the Manitoba Sugar Co. Hirose and Shinji Sato organized the workers in a union and threatened an illegal strike, winning somewhat better wages and living conditions. Many had to rebuild their lives anew after their Fraser Valley farms were sold off without the owners' permission.

■ Nisei Mass Evacuation Group

Young Nisei men, led by Fujikazu Tanaka, Robert Shimoda, and Tameo Kanbara organized the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group (NMEG) that pressed for families to be kept together. NMEG members distributed pamphlets, held public meetings and urged men to defy orders to register for road camp duty, despite admonishments to the contrary from another group, the Japanese Canadian Citizens Council. The Nisei Mass Evacuation Group gained wide grass-roots support to no avail – the BC Security Commission, with the support of the BC government, proceeded to split up the families despite viable alternatives being proposed. Some NMEG members went into hiding, others surrendered but occupied the Immigration Building in Vancouver. The government rewarded defiance by sending these justice fighters to prison-of-war camps in Petawawa and Angler, Ontario. They have never been recognized for their sacrifices in the name of justice.



Burial of POW Masano Shirakawa; Angler, ON, ca 1942. Japanese Canadian POWs were comprised of community leaders, men who refused to report to work camps, and those who resisted the “evacuation” and breakup of families, along with anyone who spoke up against the government’s actions during the mass uprooting. Prisoners initially thought the red circles on the backs of uniforms represented the Rising Sun but soon realized that they were intended as targets in case of escape attempts. NNM 2010.23.2.4.752.

► **VIDEO LINK** Learn about the remarkable Hide Hyodo Shimizu | bit.ly/37QNo8v

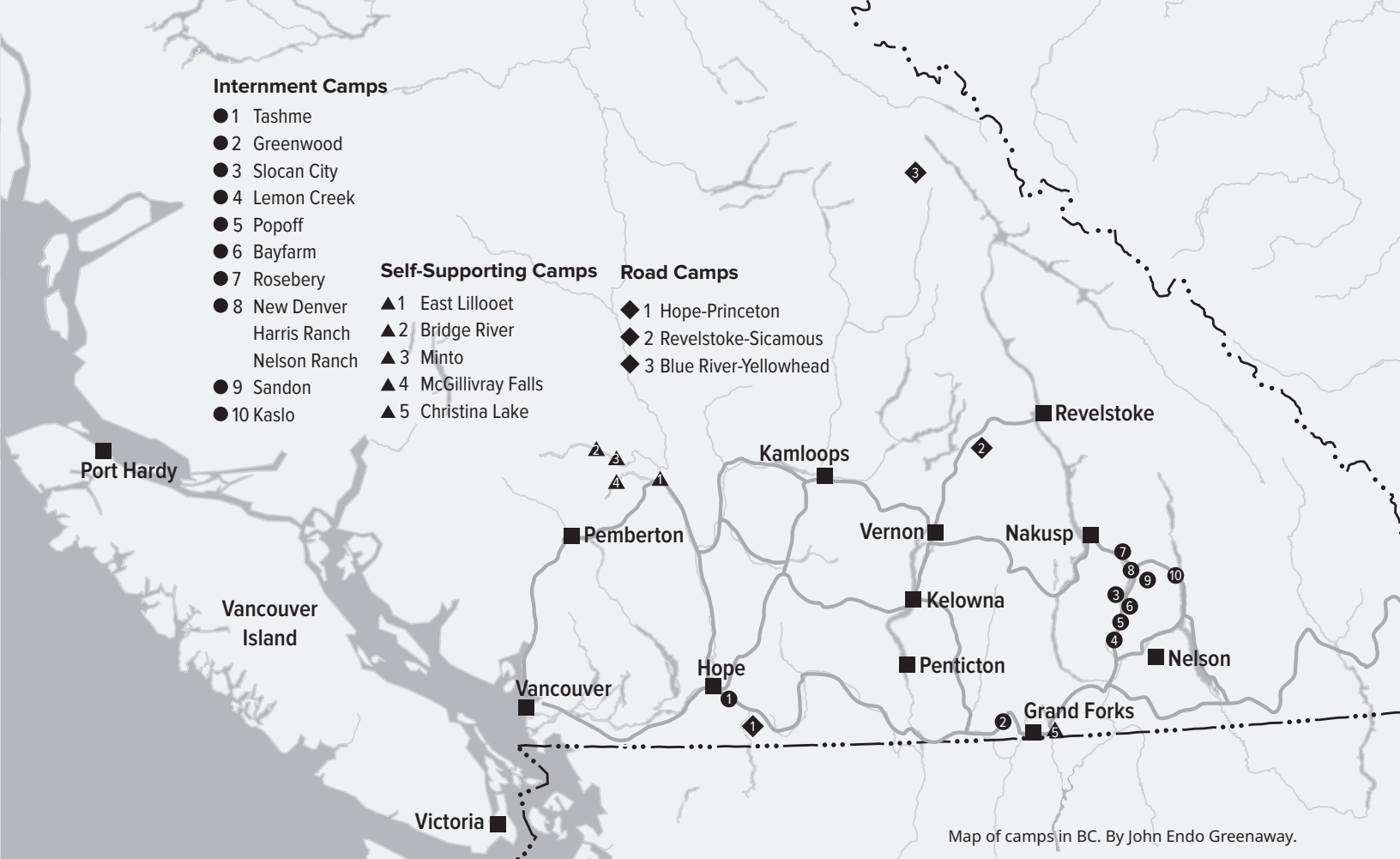
More than 12,000 Japanese Canadians were detained in camps in BC’s Interior and left largely to fend for themselves, often in harsh conditions. Young Japanese Canadian women, led by the indefatigable Hide Hyodo who in 1936 had gone to Ottawa to lobby for the vote, organized immediately to begin schooling for children.

■ Hide Hyodo Shimizu

Hide Hyodo Shimizu (1908–1999) was an educator, activist, and advocate for Japanese Canadian rights and enfranchisement. Born in Vancouver, she was the first Japanese Canadian with a teaching certificate to be hired in BC. Her first teaching job, in 1926, was a grade one class of entirely Japanese Canadian students. It was assumed that simply because Shimizu was of Japanese ancestry, she could speak Japanese, which she could not. In 1936, Shimizu addressed Parliament in an effort to have voting rights restored to Asian immigrants and their descendants. In 1941, when the Government of Canada stripped Japanese Canadians of their rights and possessions and forced them into internment camps, Shimizu recruited 120 Japanese teachers, many students themselves, and established a system of schools for the 3,000 children interned in camps throughout British Columbia. Shimizu later lobbied the government for reparations to the many Japanese Canadians who lost homes, businesses, jobs, property and more during the war. For her inspiration and invaluable contributions, she received numerous awards and honours, including the Order of Canada. The National Association of Japanese Canadians established a scholarship in Shimizu’s memory.



Hide Hyodo with students at Hastings Park after Japanese Canadians were forced out of their homes in early 1942. The BC government refused to cover the costs of education for young people incarcerated in camps. Toronto Star Archives.



“There are lingering bitter memories in the minds of those who, even to this day, cannot accept the tragic fate of our wartime experiences. These are part of the trauma ... It has been 35 years. I am a Christian woman, so I have forgiven, but it is very difficult to forget.”¹⁶

Japanese Canadians were forced into this position after the BC government refused to provide funding or teachers for the estimated 3,000 school-aged children. Despite a constitutional responsibility to fund their education, the province threatened to introduce legislation to back up the “unqualified refusal of the Government of the Province of British Columbia to assume any responsibility, either financial, or in the matter of administrative direction, in respect to the education of children of Japanese persons evacuated.”¹⁷

The New Canadian, the only journal published by Japanese Canadians during the war, responded: “The British Columbia Provincial Government should continue to bear its share in educational costs, just as it had been doing for over forty years before Pearl Harbor, and in accordance with its constitutional responsibility.”¹⁸ At the time, the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation formed a committee to organize and lobby for teaching materials, and progressive churches also sent aid.

The forced removal and detention of Japanese Canadians and their designation as “the enemy” opened the door to further persecution. Torazo Iwasaki and hundreds of other Japanese Canadians organized the Japanese Property Owners’ Association to protest government moves to sell off their property that was supposed to be held in trust by the Custodian of Enemy Property.

► **PRIMARY SOURCE** Letters protesting property sell-off, Heritage Canada (see note 20)

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** Recently published, *As If They Were the Enemy*, by Brian Smallshaw tells the story of Japanese Canadians on Salt Spring Island, including that of Torazo Iwasaki. Available in print or pdf versions | bit.ly/3hj5QKd

The enactment of Order-in-Council 469 in January 1943 was legally suspect, but authorized officials to sell, without the permission of the owners, 1,700 properties, including large forest companies, farms, and shipbuilding businesses, not to mention homes, fish boats, and personal possessions. Japanese Canadians understood the dire consequences, even at the time.

The *New Canadian* described the new law as a “dictate of a race war.”¹⁹ Torazo Iwasaki and other property owners wrote hundreds of letters to the government protesting the selling of their property.²⁰ They lodged a court case that went to trial in 1943 but the judge delayed ruling for four years – a clear case of “justice delayed is justice denied.”

Order-in-Council 469 and the sell-off of Japanese Canadian property stole the livelihood and dreams of generations, setting the course for the permanent destruction of communities. Bureaucrats in the Custodian of Enemy Property, government leaders and officials, and the courts were all complicit. Bureaucratic values had fused with racism in what Hannah Arendt describes as the “banality of evil.”²¹

During this time, Japanese Canadian homes on the Coast were looted and vandalized. White BCers such as Gavan Mouat on Salt Spring Island took advantage of the situation to take over Torazo Iwasaki’s 598-acre property at a ludicrously low price and then made large profits by subdividing and selling it off in chunks.²² Approximately 1,700 properties were disposed of in similar fashion. Thousands attended public auctions to “buy” 90,000 personal items Japanese Canadians were forced to leave behind.²³

There were exceptions.

■ The Nishga Girl

The Nisga’a hereditary chief Eli Gosnell purchased his friend Jack Tasaka’s boat, the *Orient*, during its auction, protected it, and helped return it to Jack Tasaka upon his return to the Coast.²⁴ Later, hereditary chief Harry Nyce had Jack Tasaka build another boat for him, *Nishga Girl*, that is on exhibit at the Canadian Museum of History.

The uprooting followed by dispossession meant most Japanese Canadians had nothing to come back to at war’s end. Not that they were given that choice.

BC Premier John Hart, other members of his cabinet, and Liberal federal minister Ian Mackenzie were determined to permanently exclude Japanese Canadians from the province. Thus in 1944, the federal government forced them all to choose to go to Japan or move east of the Rockies. Remaining in, or returning to, the coast was not an option. In the end, thousands were forced to move east, and 4,000 were exiled to Japan.²⁵ This only stopped after Japanese Canadians regrouped together with allies in the Cooperative Committee on Japanese Canadians to lobby against exile and filing a court case against deportations that was unfortunately lost in 1946.



Boarding train in Slokan for deportation to Japan, 1946. NNM 1996.178.1.33.

■ LITERARY MOMENT

Muriel Kitagawa penned the poem “Weep, Canadians!” in response to a headline in the *Toronto Star* on February 20, 1946: “Rule Some Japs Deportable.”

The Cabinet stands white-washed.
The judgement reads in banner headlines:
“Japs Deportable!”

Weep, Acadians!
The bitter tears of 1755
You shed in vain
Evangeline will mourn again for Gabriel
Gabriel will die again, calling,
“Evangeline!”
Weep, ye murdered Jews!
Ye homeless of this earth!
The total of your suffering is not enough
To pay the price of liberation!
Weep, Canadians
For now it seems you need the blood
Of one billion coloured men
To bring Christ back to earth again!²⁶

Discriminatory measures continued until 1949 as the BC government pressured Ottawa to keep Japanese Canadians out of the province. A comparison of the experience of Japanese Canadians to that of Japanese Americans helps to illuminate the extent of the injustices perpetrated against Japanese Canadians (see chart).

To some people, the extent of the injustices perpetrated against Japanese Canadians between 1941 and 1949 compared to what happened in the US might be surprising. But when we consider how the BC government

UNDERSTANDING JAPANESE AMERICAN AND JAPANESE CANADIAN EXPERIENCES

UNITED STATES	CANADA
Uprooted under Executive Order 9066, put into camps, legal challenges filed in courts	Uprooted by Cabinet Order-in-Council 1428, never apprised of legal rights
14,000 Japanese Americans serve in 442nd Infantry, most decorated unit in Army	Japanese Canadians barred from Canadian Armed Forces, except for 100 translators in S-20 only permitted to enlist after pressure from UK and Australia
Detention costs paid by government	Japanese Canadians must pay for detention
Government refrains from seizing properties	All properties seized and then Order-in-Council 469 of January 1943 allows government to sell off all Japanese Canadian property - land, houses, personal possessions without permission of owners
December, 1944: Mitsuye Endo successfully challenges detention in Supreme Court, authorizes ending of incarceration	In 1945, Japanese Canadians forced to leave Canada or move east of Rockies
Japanese Americans return to coast in 1945	Japanese Canadian barred from British Columbia until 1949, four years after war's end
Approximately 2/3rd of Japanese Americans return to coast	Less than 1/3 of Japanese Canadians return to coast, most remain "East of the Rockies"

perpetrated genocidal injustices against Indigenous peoples, took away the right to vote of Indigenous peoples and Asian Canadians in a manner reminiscent of US laws under slavery, and excluded Asians from immigrating in order to keep BC white, it seems less surprising. Rather than an excess committed during war, it may be more appropriate to consider BC actions as an exercise in ethnic cleansing.

With nothing to return to, many Japanese Canadians remained east of the Rockies. Johnny and Mary Madokoro, however, elected to come back after BC Packers offered financial support to return to fishing. Johnny and his family took up their offer to return to the West Coast to fish. Unable to return to Tofino because of continuing racism, Johnny and Mary Madokoro bought a house in Port Alberni and Johnny took up fishing while Mary raised three sons and daughter Marlene and son Brian. Marlene and her husband Frank still live in the family home. Similarly, T. Buck Suzuki returned to fish, becoming an important activist in the Fisherman's Union. The Matsunaga family returned to Campbell River where they took up fishing once again, eventually finding and relaunching their beloved *Soyokaze*.

However, of an estimated 3,000 Japanese Canadians who lived on Vancouver Island, only a hundred or so ever

returned. Not a single resident of Victoria ever returned there to live. Most Japanese Canadians remained in exile, striving to find new lives in towns and cities across the country.

OUT OF EXILE

The BC government conspired with the federal government to prevent the return of Japanese Canadians to BC. This caused incredible hardship as many had lost all their property and life-savings and were forced to start life anew. Out of exile, however, emerged a new determination to fight racism, to protect and grow families, and to establish new communities.

Japanese Canadians built new lives and communities but the pain inflicted by the federal and BC governments continues as families contend with this past and the continuing inter-generational trauma that it has inflicted.

From the new communities, new institutions evolved. *The Bulletin* and *Nikkei Voice* became major publications with a wide audience. The Vancouver Japanese Language School on Alexander Street, which re-opened in 1952, was recently declared a National Historic Site by Parks Canada.

■ Roger Obata C.M.*



Roger Obata emerged as a leader in the community. Raised in Prince Rupert, he had been active in the prewar Japanese Canadian Citizens League as a UBC student but had been obliged to leave Vancouver for Toronto because BC's exclusionary laws prevented him from practising his profession, engineering. With his mother interned in 1942, Roger helped found the Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy to defend the community. Roger and the rest of the executive enrolled in the Armed Forces when finally allowed to do so in 1945. Upon returning to Toronto, he helped found the National Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, representing Japanese Canadians across the country. In 1977, Roger chaired the Japanese Canadian Centennial Society to mark the arrival of the first Japanese newcomers to Canada and became the vice-president of the renamed national organization, the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) that continues to this day with 18 affiliates across the country. As a veteran and vice-president of the NAJC, Roger was a leader in the movement that won redress in 1988. He was one of the founders of the Momiji Seniors Home in Toronto and was inducted into the Order of Canada in 1990.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE NAJC** | najc.ca/member-organizations

In the 1970s, the Japanese Canadian communities came together to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrants to Canada and went on to lobby and campaign for civil rights, participating fully in the Constitutional and multiculturalism discussions then taking place. It also began a campaign for redress for the injustices of 1941–1949 that culminated in the Redress settlement of 1988.²⁷

🔊) **PRIMARY SOURCE** Listen to Roy Miki, one of the leaders of the redress settlement, discuss his view of the settlement 30 years later (see digital edition).

In 2012, the BC government offered an apology for what happened to Japanese Canadians but failed to acknowledge its own role or enact measures of



Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and NAJC President Art Miki signing the Redress Agreement; Parliament Hill, Ottawa, September 22, 1988. NNM 2010.32.55.



The National Association of Japanese Canadians present minister Lisa Beare with consultation report requesting BC redress. From left, Mary Keiko Kitagawa, Lorene, Oikawa (president), Lisa Beare, Maryka Omatsu. Photo by Toshi Kitagawa.

rectification. The NAJC continues to press for full acknowledgment and redress measures. In 2019, over a six-month period, Japanese Canadian communities were asked for their input about what a just redress settlement would involve. Following this consultation, the NAJC submitted a report to the BC government.²⁸

Subsequently, talks began with the premier, ministers, and other ministry officials. To clarify the community's position, the NAJC submitted its major requests to the Institute for Financial Studies and Democracy (IFSD), which has costed and prepared a business case to be submitted to the government. During the 2020 provincial election, the NDP pledged to come to a redress settlement with the Japanese Canadian community. A just and timely settlement would suggest the BC government is willing to repudiate systemic racism.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** Maryka Omatsu, *Swimming Upstream: Japanese Canadian Struggle for Justice in BC* | bit.ly/2OpCkYI

ENDNOTES

- ¹ United Nations, Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, "Final Report of the UN Commission of Experts re the Former Yugoslavia," S/25274, at bit.ly/3rHwXDA
- ² Teachers' resource guides on Japanese Canadian history are available online at japanesecanadianhistory.net. Listen to Japanese Canadians relate their stories via SFU's Japanese Canadian Oral History Collection, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/3ry4Kz2 (not accessible to public)
- ³ See Multicultural History Society of Ontario, *The New Canadian*, SFU Digitized Newspapers, accessed December 15, 2020, newspapers.lib.sfu.ca/tnc-collection. See also Ann Gomer Sunahara's monumental work *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1981), available through the National Nikkei Museum and Cultural Centre web portal at centre.nikkeiplace.org/research/por
- ⁴ "Nellie McClung," *Victoria Daily Times Magazine*, January 10, 1942, 7.
- ⁵ Muriel Kitagawa, *This Is My Own: Letters to Wes and Other Writings on Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985), 71.
- ⁶ The story of the Soyokaze is told by Beth Boyce, "The Soyokaze: A Gentle Wind that Weathered the Storm," *BC Studies* 204 (Winter 2019/20): 171-82. See also Soyokaze (Gentle Wind), Campbell River Museum, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/3aKmpUj
- ⁷ S.J. Willis to Tsutae Sato Esq, as cited in Tsutae and Eiko Sato, *Kodomo to tomo ni 50 Nen* [Teaching Japanese Canadian Children for 50 Years], December 8, 1941; "Japanese Schools to Close in BC by Special Decree," *British Colonist*, December 11, 1941, 9.
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- ⁹ "BC Gov't May Act in Japanese Problem," *Vancouver Sun*, January 5, 1942, 13.
- ¹⁰ For details, see Conference on the Japanese Problem in British Columbia Minutes, January 8-9, 1942, Library and Archives Canada, RG 117, vol. 1, 2 (part 1); Maurice A. Pope, *Soldiers and Politicians: The Memoirs of Lt.-Gen. Maurice A. Pope* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 177. See also Maryka Omatsu, *Swimming Upstream: Japanese Canadian Struggle for Justice in BC*, accessed December 15, 2020, centre.nikkeiplace.org/other-resources
- ¹¹ "Woman MLA Cautions BC on 'Race Hatred,'" *Vancouver Sun*, January 16, 1942, 4.
- ¹² "Winch Insists Japs' Removal Be Immediate," *Victoria Daily Times*, February 23, 1942, 13.
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- ²⁶ Muriel Kitagawa, "Weep, Canadians," *The New Canadian*, March 2, 1946, 2.
- ²⁷ Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004); Maryka Omatsu, *Bittersweet Passage: Redress and the Japanese Canadian Experience* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992).
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*Written with information provided by Lynn Deustcher Kobayashi.



James (Nexw'Kalus-Xwalacktun) Harry and Lauren Brevner created this powerful imagery as part of the Vancouver Mural Festival during the anti-racist upsurge in 2020. "The concept of this mural design is centered around community and solidarity with two female figures standing back to back clothed in a Salish blanket. The image as a whole is referencing the design of traditional Salish blankets to speak to an ongoing series of our works called "Weaving Culture, Weaving Spirit!" (Artists' statement, Facebook).

DREAM WEAVER (2020) – location: 1000 Eveleigh St, Vancouver, BC V7M 1M3 – with @laurenbrevner

“BRITISH COLUMBIA”? CHANGE AND CHALLENGES: SYSTEMIC RACISM

The end of World War II saw white supremacy on the defensive. However, by then white settlers had come to dominate in terms of population and in almost every sphere. Indigenous and racialized communities had survived and came out of the war strengthened. Yet it remained an uphill battle to root out racism in BC.

POPULATION OF BC ¹				
Year	Indigenous	Black	Racialized	White
1951	28,000	438	25,039	1,111,733

Note: These figures likely underestimate the number of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Communities but are generally indicative of the scale of white domination at this time.

As First Nations reorganized, they waged important struggles for land and justice leading to the constitutional and legal victories of the 1980s and 1990s, including the Delgamuukw decision of 1997 that marked a significant legal step forward in the fight for land justice. The movements for the franchise ended in victory, as did the fight against overt discrimination in immigration. The Constitution Act, 1982, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Multiculturalism Act, for all its weaknesses, also represented significant steps. Increasingly, the legal underpinnings of white supremacy were coming undone.

But racism by this time had become entrenched. It was one thing to gain legal victories, quite another to have the legal decisions put into practice. The culture, regulations, and operating procedures of public and private institutions had come to reflect the norms of whiteness and racism remained widespread.

The 1967 commemoration of Canadian Confederation is a case in point. Under the guise of urban renewal and freeway development, city planners took aim at Chinatowns and Black communities. In Duncan, BC, they succeeded in destroying the Chinatown. In Vancouver, a community alliance based in the Strathcona neighbourhood saved Chinatown, but Hogan’s Alley, the heart of the Black community, was sacrificed, just as the city of Halifax razed the African Canadian community in Africville.



Nora Hendrix. Hogan's Alley Society.

■ Hogan’s Alley

Hogan’s Alley is the unofficial name given to the Strathcona area of Vancouver that was home to the Black community. Among those who lived there was

Nora Hendrix, grandmother of rock legend Jimi Hendrix. The community was destroyed as part of the 1960s urban renewal. Today, it is rebuilding through the efforts of the Hogan’s Alley Society and others. A new modular housing residence has been named after Nora Hendrix and a community centre is also in the offing.

In the 1980s, Asian Canadian movements for redress led to a first victory in 1988 when Japanese Canadians achieved a settlement in which the federal government acknowledged its wrongdoing and provided a redress compensation package of more than \$400 million, including \$21,000 for each survivor. At the same time the Asian Canadian Writers Workshop (asiancanadianwriters.ca) brought varied writers together to publish anthologies, helping produce *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* (1979) and *The Asian Canadian and the Arts* (1981), a special issue of *West Coast Review*, a journal that later became *West Coast Line*.

In BC, the government only began to come to terms with its racist policies through redress for Chinese Canadians in 2014 with the submission of the Chinese Historical Wrongs Consultation Final Report and Recommendations.² This resulted in Chinese legacy projects worth more than \$1 million. In subsequent years, the BC government also sponsored the Japanese Canadian Historic Sites registry project, as well as initiatives to support not only a provincial Chinese Canadian museum but also the Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project, which resulted in a recent \$1.14 million grant to the South Asian Studies Institute to present *Haq and History: A Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project*. Following on the provincial NDP’s re-election in 2020, the Japanese Canadian community awaits the government’s honouring of its pledge to meaningfully redress the historic wrongs to the community.



BC Coalition of Head Tax Payers, Spouses, and Descendants. “LO WAH KIU: Chinese Head Tax Redress” by jencastrotakespictures. Licensed with CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Recently the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Actions are having a profound impact.³ The movements for change and reform have meant that today there is little social sanction for white supremacy of the past.

Yet, for all the effort, and despite decades of suffering, racism continues, permeating the institutions and culture inherited from more than a century of settler colonialism. Beneath a veneer of equality and adherence to multiculturalism, there exists a tangled, often-invisible web of prejudice that make up what we call systemic racism. This web includes the social standards against whom all are judged and usually reflects a normative white settler experience, affording those of European heritage the perennial advantage of white privilege.

■ LITERARY MOMENT

The poet Janisse Browning captures the social racism she has lived as woman of Black and First Nations heritage.

Memory Two: Hair Liberalism

Grade Four. Somewhere in the deep south of Canada, standing in line after recess.

white-girl-behind: Mind if I braid your hair?

black-girl-in-front: Yes.

wgb: Do you mean yes, it’s okay for me to braid your hair, or yes, you mind if I braid your hair?

bgif: I mean yes, I do mind.

wgb: But why?

bgif: I don’t want my hair braided.

wgb: Will you just let me touch it?

bgif: Why?

wgb: Your hair looks so soft and poofey. It’s not like other Black girls’ hair.

bgif: What do you mean?

wgb: Well...your hair’s not greasy for one thing. You don’t use Vaseline like other Black girls, DO YOU?

bgif: [Silence...]

wgb: Oh, please! Just let me touch it.

teacher: Move along, girls.⁴

White privilege does not mean white folks are bad – it simply recognizes that the history of settler colonialism here in BC has afforded privileges to white settlers and their descendants while impairing the rights of Indigenous peoples, Black, and diverse racialized communities. That privilege forms the basis for systemic racism today and requires serious efforts if we are to put an end to it and move forward.

Many people today are open to change. As author Bev Sellars tells those who want to apologize for the racist past: “I know you are not personally responsible for these laws and policies, but now that you are aware, you have a responsibility to help change the situation. You cannot turn a blind eye to this because, if you do, you will be doing the same thing as your ancestors.”⁵

The recent anti-racist upsurge shows that we have a lot to do. Prejudice can exist in all communities, racialized or not, and this must be confronted wherever it is found. It will take effort and the redeployment of resources in every sector of society if we are to meet the challenges ahead. It will require many people learning, perhaps for the first time, what it means to be an ally in ending racism. Environmental racism, in which natural resource development takes place at the expense of Indigenous land rights and the negative effects of which disproportionately affect Indigenous communities, is institutionalized. As we saw with the COVID-19 pandemic, racism can erupt at any time.



Activists from the Filipino community and allies commemorate the 8th International Domestic Workers Day in Vancouver, 2019. Courtesy Migrant Workers Centre.

BC’s demographics today differ from earlier colonial trends. The province’s Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) represent a small but growing proportion of the population, and the proportion of non-white residents has substantially increased. What were in the past referred to as “visible minorities” today represent a significant and growing proportion of the province’s population and now include South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipinx, Latinx, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, as well as great numbers of mixed heritage people. Yet these groups face institutional barriers that derive from systemic racism.

Domestic workers, undocumented workers, temporary foreign workers, and refugees continue to face an uphill battle against racist exclusions. Organizations such as the BC Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA), No One is

Illegal (NOII), and the Migrant Workers Centre (MWC) are doing essential work to defend these often-marginalized people.

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCES BCCLA:** bccla.org | **NOII:** noii-van.resist.ca | **MWC:** mwcbc.ca/our-story

As we witnessed recently, racism can become overt and intense in times of crisis. Too often those labelled “Asian” or “Chinese” become targets. Other racialized groups also become prey to racism – victims of hate crimes, or subject to micro-aggression. Muslim and Arab peoples have been fighting discrimination and Islamophobia continuously, particularly after 9/11.⁶ And anti-Semitic incidents are still occurring.⁷

Today, Indigenous and Black communities, in particular, continue to confront racism in too many ways. After 25 years of treaty discussions in BC, the vast majority of First Nations remain without access or title to their traditional territories or rights. The right to fish as formerly remains fundamental to First Nations who, despite court rulings favouring Indigenous fisheries, continue to face challenges gaining access to and preserving fish stocks. Food security remains elusive. Racism targeting Indigenous people in the health system prompted a special inquiry headed by Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. Her report, released at the end of 2020, found systemic racism in the health system, with 84 percent of Indigenous respondents reporting some form of discrimination.⁸ In Summer 2020, Lucy Bell, a Haida woman who headed the Royal BC Museum’s First Nations Department and Repatriation program resigned in protest over the racism she encountered: “There is outright discrimination. There’s white privilege. There’s bullying. There’s micro aggressions that happen here every day,” she stated in her resignation speech.⁹

We believe systemic racism continues in multiple and ever-changing forms in most government services, including in the education system, and in society at large. Racialized communities continue to feel the brunt of this discrimination.¹⁰ In particular, systemic racism continues and imposes major impediments for Indigenous peoples of BC:

- life expectancy is eight years less than non-Indigenous people;
- mortality rates are nearly double;
- youth suicide rates are triple non-Indigenous rates;¹¹
- Indigenous population is less than six percent of the total, yet 30 percent of male inmates provincially are Indigenous while 47 percent of female inmates are Indigenous;¹²



Red dresses, symbol of missing and murdered Indigenous women, hung at Unist'ot'en healing centre to highlight the dangers of industrial development in the area. Amanda Follett Hosgood, the Tyee.

- among Vancouver's homeless, 33 percent are Indigenous people though only representing 2.5 percent of the city's population;¹³ and
- despite huge improvements in education achievements, only 70 percent of Indigenous students graduate from high school compared to 86 percent of non-Indigenous.¹⁴

Indigenous peoples and Black communities in BC remain perpetual targets as racism forever paints these groups as different from the white norm and making them vulnerable to police checks. A recent report pointed out: "Between 2008 and 2017, Indigenous people accounted for over 15% of street checks despite being 2% of the population, and Black people accounted for 4% of street checks despite making up 1% of the population. In 2016, Indigenous women, who comprise 2% of Vancouver's women population, accounted for 21% of women who were street checked."¹⁵ DI Joe, an Indigenous woman put it clearly: "The police don't protect us; they harass us."¹⁶

In the face of a racist, anti-Black video circulated at Lord Byng Secondary School in Vancouver, activists formed the BC Community Alliance (bccommunityalliance.com). A chapter of Black Lives Matter Vancouver has also become active, helping to organize against racism and support community initiatives (blacklivesmattervancouver.com).

► **COMMUNITY RESOURCE** The national REDress movement aims to foreground the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls tragedy. The movement was started by Métis artist Jaime Black in 2010. | www.jaimeblackartist.com/exhibitions



Four years ago, Black Lives Matter Vancouver organized a "March on Pride" parade into Davie Village to reclaim Pride as a police-free event, making it a safer and accessible space for LGBTQ2S+ Black, Indigenous, and other racialized peoples. Photo: Janet Rerecich/Daily Xtra.

The recommendations of the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent go to the heart of identifying systemic and structural racism in Canada; calling on institutions to eliminate the phenomenon popularly

known as “racial profiling”; ensure equitable and fair access to justice, and implement policies and programs that promote diversity, equality, social justice and equality of opportunity. The federal government and Nova Scotia, Ontario and Alberta, as well as the city of Victoria have officially recognized the International Decade for People of African Descent but the BC government has yet to do so. As mentioned in the Introduction, all levels of governments will also need to consider major issues including defunding and demilitarization of police forces and the reallocation of resources towards support for alternative services in close consultation with those most affected by racism. The ongoing struggles for justice and redress by Indigenous peoples, Black and racialized communities have been important in overcoming white supremacy but there remains a long way to go. Historically, anti-racism has not been a priority for the provincial government. According to its own statistics, the government spent only \$10.1 million between 2002 and 2014 on multiculturalism and anti-racism education.¹⁷

In the wake of the anti-racist uprising, the provincial government has identified anti-racism as a priority, appointing a parliamentary secretary for anti-racism; funding the anti-racist network Resilience BC; promising to introduce an anti-racism law; introducing legislation to allow responsible race-based data collection; and providing redress for its role in the ethnic cleansing of Japanese Canadians. These are important steps forward. However, given that the provincial government has historically played the major role in perpetrating white supremacy and systemic racism, it needs to provide full disclosure of its own role and provide the resources necessary so that Indigenous, Black and all racialized communities are empowered to make the changes necessary so that justice can be achieved.

In recent years, Indigenous peoples’ quest for justice and demands for change have made inroads but not without a continuing backlash. In August 2018, Victoria City Council voted to remove the statue of John A. Macdonald from in front of city hall.¹⁸ The decision, prompted by complaints from Lekwungen representatives attending reconciliation discussions at city hall, created a storm of controversy.

In New Westminster, city council there voted to remove a statue of BC’s first chief justice, Mathew Begbie, for his involvement in the hanging of Tsilhqot’in Chiefs, including Lhat’saŝ’in who resisted colonial incursions on their land.¹⁹ Across Canada, who is honoured is being



■ Doug Hudlin

Doug Hudlin “Gentleman Umpire” is a direct descendant of Charles and Nancy Alexander and a founding member of the BC Black History Awareness Society. He was a founder and served as first president of the BC Baseball Umpires Association, a position he

held from 1974 to 1979. He was inducted into the Victoria Sports Hall of Fame in 1998, the BC Baseball Umpires Association Hall of Fame in 2011 and inducted posthumously into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in 2017. To honour his legacy, the BC Baseball Umpires Association presents the Doug Hudlin Distinguished Service Award each year to a dedicated and long-serving umpire in the province. The National Little League, where Doug served as an umpire for over 40 years, presents the “Doug Hudlin Award” annually to a junior umpire “who is never late, never misses a shift, and deemed by their peers and the league to always be professional and respectful to players, fans, and coaches.” Beginning in 2018, “Doug Hudlin Day” is now celebrated each year in June in Victoria with a charity baseball game to support “Step Up to the Plate,” a program of sports for children who do not have the financial means to participate.

Image: James Douglas “Doug” Hudlin 1988. Courtesy Barbara Hudlin.

challenged, be it through name changes, removal of statues after a vote, or via direct action.

Who and what communities choose to honour, the languages we use, the names we assign to public spaces, and the education we provide all reflect and influence social values. Times are changing and so too are the public symbols and services that communities may want to celebrate. However, change must go beyond the symbolic and involve a fundamental realignment of social values and structures so that justice can prevail. We raise our hands to the many Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities who have fought so hard to end racism and to the allies who have supported them. We hope this resource will allow others to understand their stories, pay tribute to their efforts, and join them in fighting for justice and putting an end to racist “British Columbia.”

150 years is long enough.

ENDNOTES

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- ² BC Government, *Chinese Historical Wrongs Consultation: Final Report and Recommendations*, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/3oc5oAd
- ³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action, accessed October 28, 2020, bit.ly/3nYgbOh
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- ⁶ See the Islamophobia Hotline, accessed December 15, bit.ly/3pwUhBZ
- ⁷ Anti-Semitism does exist and occasionally erupts in specific incidents; however, the extent of anti-Semitism in BC historically appears relatively limited according to the Jewish Virtual Library's assessment, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/3aOtYmJ. See also Lynne Marks, "Not Being Religious Didn't Take Away from Their Jewishness," *BC Studies* 181 (Spring 2004): 63–82. The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre carries out Holocaust-based anti-racism education and commemoration, accessed December 15, 2020, www.vhec.org. The classic study on anti-Semitism in Canada is Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933–1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).
- ⁸ The 228-page report *In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-Specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care* by the Addressing Racism Review (November 2020) is available online, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/3aTg1Ec
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- ¹³ BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver: Preliminary Data Report (Vancouver, 2020), 9.
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On Sunday, September 24, 2017, 50,000 people of all backgrounds took part in a Reconciliation Walk. The march began in downtown Vancouver, proceeded over the Georgia Viaduct and ended at Strathcona Park. The walk was born from the vision of Chief Robert Joseph, Ambassador of Reconciliation Canada, calling for a shared commitment towards reconciliation and revitalized relationships among Indigenous peoples and all Canadians. Pictured are members of the Japanese Canadian community. From left: Jamil Kenji Thomson, Judge Maryka Omatsu, Carolyn Nakagawa, Grace Eiko Thomson, Judy Hanazawa, Professor Setsuko Sonoda.

GLOSSARY¹

ABORIGINAL In the Canadian legal and political context, this denotes First Nations (status and non-status), Métis, and/or Inuit.

ABORIGINAL TITLE Indigenous ownership (title) of their traditional territories.

AFRICAN DESCENT People of African descent live in many countries of the world, either dispersed among the local population or in communities. The largest concentration can be found in Latin America and the Caribbean where estimates reach 150 million.

ANTI-SEMITISM A discriminatory perception of, and actions against Jews and/or their communities, faith or institutions.

ASIAN A term denoting people of or from Asia that geographically may include East Asians, Southeast Asians, South Asians, or West Asians.

ASIAN CANADIAN People of Asian heritage living in Canada, who may share common experiential connections of migration and to (de)colonization in this country.

BLACK A designation for people of African or Caribbean ancestry.

CHINESE No single definition captures the complex histories of migration and unique identities related to this term. Can refer to people living in China today as well as the historic diasporas.

CHINESE CANADIAN People of Chinese ancestry living and making their homes in Canada, including those here for multiple generations as well as newcomers.

COLONIALISM The subjugation in part or wholly of a people or country by a dominant group or imperial power. In the modern era, European powers attempted to subjugate the world to their control. See SETTLER COLONIALISM as a specific variant.

DECOLONIZATION The process of dismantling the institutions and culture of colonialism that continue to exist and that underpin systematic racism.

DISPOSSESSION The taking of a community's land, culture, language, possessions, or livelihood.

ETHNICITY A group that shares similar cultural affinities that could include shared origins, language or dialects, culture, or traditions. Can be a subset of a racial category.

GHADAR Meaning 'Mutiny' or 'Rebellion', this movement flourished in the Pacific Northwest beginning in 1913. Its goal was to rid India of British colonialism and to defend the rights of South Asian migrants.

GURDWARA Literally the 'gateway to the guru/teacher'. This refers to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the Sikh scriptures and text. First built in BC with the arrival of Sikh settlers around 1900, these spaces served all South Asians at the time, including those of Hindu and Muslim faiths.

INDIGENOUS Communities of peoples who identify themselves as descendants of the original inhabitants of their ancestral homelands and who are land/water-based cultures disrupted by colonial invasion(s).

INTERSECTIONALITY The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender that often manifest as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

INUIT The Indigenous people of the north who live in Nunavut, Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunatsiavut (Newfoundland and Labrador), and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (western Arctic). Inuit means "people" in the Inuktitut language. The term "Inuk" denotes a one Inuit person.

ISLAMOPHOBIA Fear, hatred of, or prejudice against the Islamic religion or Muslims.

MÉTIS Originally those descended from intermarriage between French and Scottish fur traders and Indigenous women who settled in the Red River Colony. Today the definition includes the diasporas associated with this original group and others.

PRE-EMPTION Land regulations passed by the BC government allowing mainly white settlers to claim up to 320 acres of Indigenous land just by staking it out. If the land was developed the claimant could then obtain outright ownership by paying a small fee.

PREJUDICE Biased or discriminatory beliefs or attitudes (conscious or unconscious) held by individuals towards a racialized group or people associated (rightly or wrongly) with the group. Prejudice can exist in any community and can be based on gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or culture as well as ethnicity or race. Prejudice plus power, whether directed at an individual or more broadly, equals racism.

RACE Race Imposed categories and hierarchies of people that may share common ancestry and/or ostensibly similar physical traits that might include skin tone, hair texture, stature, or facial characteristics. Humans are intrinsically similar genetically and thus race is considered to be social constructed, often by socially dominant groups, to reflect discriminatory or cultural attitudes of superiority. With colonialism, race was constructed to justify imperial expansion by white-dominated powers. We generally avoid the term as it can normalize an otherwise unjustifiable notion.

RACIALIZATION The ongoing processes of constructing and imposing racial categories and characteristics on a given person or community.

RACISM When prejudice and power combine to discriminate against a particular group or individuals of a group. This term points to the particular effects of state-sponsored racism such as police violence or divide-and-rule policies towards Indigenous, Black, or racialized communities.

SETTLER COLONIALISM The colonial subjugation of Indigenous lands particularly through the deployment of non-Indigenous peoples as settlers who then become the dominant group in the affected territory. British settler colonies today include the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

SOUTH ASIAN The term used by those who identify with this region that includes India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan. Indo-Canadian is still used by some but it and 'East-Indian' are less current because of their hyphenated nature and geographical/historical inaccuracy. As the diversity of settlement grows, some people increasingly identify regionally and linguistically, i.e., as Punjabi. The dynamic nature of identity reflects the complexity of migration and settlement.

SYSTEMIC RACISM Institutionalized discrimination that may appear neutral but in fact establishes white domination as the norm and that has an exclusionary and discriminatory impact on Indigenous, Black and racialized communities.

WHITE PRIVILEGE The advantages accrued by those of European heritage in relation to Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities. For example, a white family whose ancestors were able to enter Canada while a Chinese family was denied that right. The ability to pursue their goals without facing racial barriers, though other barriers including class and gender may well exist.

WHITE SUPREMACY An ideology that openly or otherwise promotes the superiority of white people by associating them with superior moral values or defending them as a group in danger of losing their identity. In liberal-democratic societies, white supremacy tends to go underground but continues in the form of systemic racism as well as in radical groups such as the Proud Boys.

ENDNOTES

¹ This glossary is a composite index of terms that draws on the following sources: British Columbia Black History Awareness Society, "Definitions," bit.ly/34Vcjz; Canadian Race Relations Foundation, Glossary of Terms bit.ly/3n6PvK1; British Columbia's office of the Human Rights Commissioner, "Glossary," bit.ly/3pyXjWp; Chelsea Vowel, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* (Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2016); Denise Fong and Henry Yu, "Usage of Terms" as part of the Exhibit A Seat at the Table – Chinese Immigration and British Columbia," Museum of Vancouver, 2020; Henry Yu, "Asian Canadian History," in Eiichiro Azuma and David Yoo, editors, *Oxford Handbook of Asian American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), and also *Journeys of Hope – Challenging Discrimination and Building on Vancouver Chinatown's Legacies* (Vancouver: Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies, 2018).

CONTRIBUTORS

Co-Authors

Nicholas XEMFOLTW Claxton is an assistant professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and elected chief of Tsawout Nation (WSĀNEĆ). His doctoral work focused on the revitalization of his nation's traditional reef net fishery. He is a co-author of "Whose Land Is It? Rethinking Sovereignty in British Columbia," in *BC Studies*, 204 (Winter 2019/20).

Denise Fong is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of British Columbia where her research focuses on critical heritage and Chinese Canadian history. She is the co-curator of *A Seat at the Table - Chinese Immigration and British Columbia*, produced by the Museum of Vancouver and UBC. She was the co-curator of Burnaby Village Museum's award-winning exhibit, *Across the Pacific* that explored the history and legacy of Chinese Canadians in Burnaby.

Fran Morrison, project manager in the private and public sectors, is a director with the BC Black History Awareness Society, managing and overseeing the content research and development for their website. She is the project manager for a BC Black History project with Digital Museums Canada.

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Maryka Omatsu is a judge and a member of the negotiating team that won the 1988 redress agreement with the federal government. She is the author of *Bittersweet Passage: Redress and the Japanese Canadian Experience* and producer of the video *Swimming Upstream – Injustice Revealed*. She currently is a director of the National Association of Japanese Canadians.

John Price is professor emeritus of history at the University of Victoria. He is the author of *Orienting Canada: Race, Empire and the Transpacific* (2011) and co-editor of the special issue of *B.C. Studies, (Un)Settling the Islands: Race, Indigeneity and the Transpacific* (2020).

Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra is the coordinator of the South Asian Studies Institute at the University of the Fraser Valley and co-curator of exhibits at the Sikh Heritage Museum, located at the National Historic Site Gur Sikh Temple in Abbotsford BC. A PhD candidate in history at the University of British Columbia, she specializes in museum history using critical race theory.

Development Team

Jackie Bohez is the project's advisor on multi-media production. With a background in organizational and cultural change, Jackie believes in the power of storytelling and video advocacy as a tool to engage people to create change. A recent co-recipient of Commfest's Making a Difference Award, her videos address racial injustice, animal cruelty and community advocacy.

John Endo Greenaway is the project's graphic designer/ advisor. He is a designer, writer, *taiko* player and composer based in Port Moody, BC. He began exploring his mixed Japanese Canadian heritage as a founding member of Canada's first taiko group in 1979, and has delved even deeper over the past 27 years as editor of *The Bulletin: a journal of Japanese Canadian community, history & culture*. He is a co-author of the 2017 book *Departures: chronicling the expulsion of the Japanese Canadians from the west coast 1942-1949*.

Jessica MacVicar is the project researcher and media developer. She recently completed her BA in Political Science and Social Justice Studies at the University of Victoria. She is excited to be a part of the ACVI project, to learn more about the history of this region, to challenge harmful, inaccurate colonial narratives, and to assist in educating others to advance a better future for all.

Brian Smallshaw is responsible for the project's web development. Brian completed his M.A. in history at the University of Victoria in 2017. He lived for many years in Japan and other countries in Asia prior to moving to Salt Spring Island. His book on the dispossession of Japanese Canadians on Salt Spring Island, *As If They Were the Enemy*, was published in 2020.

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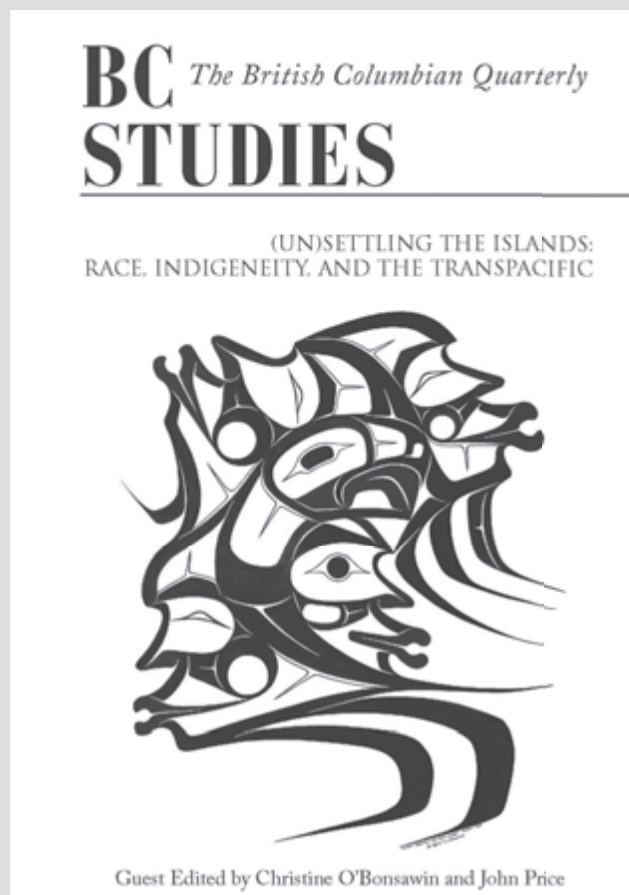
Funded by a four-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant, the University of Victoria research project “Asian Canadians on Vancouver Island: Race, Indigeneity and the Transpacific” partnered with small museums on Vancouver Island and adjacent islands to collect stories and archival materials related to Asian Canadian (including Japanese, Chinese, and South Asian Canadians) and Indigenous peoples on the islands.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (BC Office)

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives is an independent, non-partisan research institute concerned with issues of social, economic and environmental justice. The CCPA BC Office investigates key challenges facing our province, and proposes policy solutions that promote systemic change. To learn more visit www.policynote.ca

FURTHER READING

BC Studies No. 204 “(Un)Settling the Islands: Race, Indigeneity, and the Transpacific,” released in January 2020, features many articles on topics developed in this resource. It is available to read online free of charge: bcstudies.com/issue-single/bc-studies-no-204-winter-2019-20



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This print edition of *Challenging Racist “British Columbia,” 150 Years and Counting* originated with the University of Victoria research project, *Asian Canadians on Vancouver Island: Race, Indigeneity and the Transpacific* (ACVI). It is co-published by ACVI and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (BC Office). The authors, development team, and publishers acknowledge that we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. We pay tribute to the many activists and scholars, particularly from Indigenous, Black and racialized communities, whose efforts in fighting for justice over the past 150 years and more, inspire and inform this booklet. The views expressed in this resource are those of the authors, and the responsibility for errors or faulty interpretations are theirs alone. Financial support for ACVI came from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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Coughlin at the scholarly journal, *BC Studies*, were instrumental in assisting with the publication of the special issue “(Un)Settling the Islands: Race, Indigeneity and the Transpacific” (*BC Studies* 204, Winter 2019/20) that included many articles referred to in this resource. Many individuals stepped forward to help in a myriad of ways – they include Dave Ages and Virginia Monk, social activists; Barbara Lee of the Vancouver Asian Film Festival; Karin Lee, award-winning filmmaker; Ellen Woodsworth of Women Transforming Cities.

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The ACVI project was directed by John Price and included researchers Rita Kaur Dhamoon and Christine O'Bonsawin (both at the University of Victoria) as well as Tusa Shea (UVIC) and Imogene Lim (Vancouver Island University), who participated in the earlier phases of the project to 2017. Although not directly involved in this version of *150 Years and Counting*, we raise our hands to Margarita James and the Mowachaht/Muchalaht peoples, the WSÁNEĆ peoples, and the Lekwungen peoples who have supported the ACVI project. Partner museums in earlier phases of the ACVI project included Cowichan Valley Museum and Archives, Kaatza Station Museum and Archives, Cumberland Museum and Archives, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Alberni Valley Museum, Nanaimo Museum, Nanaimo Community Archives, the Museum at Campbell River, Salt Spring Archives and Library, Sidney Museum and Archives, Esquimalt Municipal Archives, Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, Nuyumbalees Cultural Centre, U'mista Cultural Centre, and the Japanese Garden Society on Saltspring Island. Vancouver Island University also contributed substantially to the project. With their assistance, and the work of Steven Davies, Kyla Fitzgerald, Connie Graham, Wenjuan Lu, Owen Mar, Sonia Manak, Jennifer Seidel, Tad Suzuki, Jeff Tanaka, Macayla Yan, Brian Smallshaw, Faith Takashita, and Jillian Valpy, the ACVI project visited many communities, gathered documents, conducted interviews, and worked collaboratively with our partners to unearth stories long forgotten or marginalized. The research collection from their efforts formed the documentary basis for *150 Years and Counting*.

CHALLENGING RACIST “BRITISH COLUMBIA” : 150 YEARS AND COUNTING

Challenging Racist “British Columbia,” 150 Years and Counting retells history from the perspective of the marginalized; white supremacist origins and the marginalization of Indigenous, Black and Asian peoples as well as staunch historical and contemporary anti-colonial and anti-racist resistance. Vividly illustrated, concise, accessibly and engagingly written, this gem of a text offers difficult knowledge about the past, examples of continued activism in the present and hence hope for an equitable future. – *Handel Kashope Wright, Centre for Culture, Identity & Education, University of British Columbia*

At a time in our history when we have seen unprecedented changes in society, this book provides the foundational knowledge and justification for the need to drastically challenge the deep-rooted racism in so-called “British Columbia.” This book beautifully represents the resistance movements currently underway that seriously challenge another 150 years of racist “British Columbia.” – *Sleydo (Molly Wickham), spokesperson for Gidimt’en Checkpoint, Wet’suwet’en territory.*

150 Years and Counting is a ‘must read’ for all Canadians. Rarely has a book on British Columbia covered the story of systemic racism so fully and powerfully as this one. It should be a staple of classrooms and households across the county. – *Wendy Wickwire, professor emerita, BC history (UVic); author of award-winning biography of James Teit, At the Bridge.*

This is an accessible and engaging resource that will help teachers and students in an anti-racist process of understanding how a long history of racism has left enduring consequences that must be undone for British Columbia to truly achieve its promise of a just and inclusive society. The authors have used concise prose and effective visuals to convey difficult and yet important ideas in a clear and effective manner. – *Henry Yu, Associate Professor of History, University of British Columbia*

A timely, multi-faceted, accessible assessment of the complexity of racism in this province. It is an excellent step, as voiced in the introduction, “in the development of inclusive, intersectional analyses to support decolonization”. – *Sherri Kajiwara, Director/Curator, Nikkei National Museum*

This new resource gives a much-needed, fresh and intercultural look at BC history from previously marginalized perspectives, including those of our host First Nations. The book is an accessible “must-read” for anyone wanting to understand how systemic racism came to be embedded within BC society and institutions.

– *Wendy Yip (President) and Winnie Cheung (Executive Director), Pacific Canada Heritage Centre-Museum of Migration Society*



Full list of endorsements at
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