



Japanese Canadian Citizens Association

Greater Vancouver Chapter

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THE INTERNMENT OF JAPANESE CANADIANS DURING WORLD WAR II: THE REDRESS ISSUE

A PAMPHLET PREPARED BY
THE JCCA REDRESS STEERING COMMITTEE

WHAT IS REDRESS?

During and after World War II, the Canadian government acted without justification in uprooting and interning Japanese Canadians, confiscating and liquidating their property and belongings, and prohibiting their return to British Columbia until April 1949, four years after the war ended.

Redress begins with an acknowledgement by the federal government of these injustices, followed by negotiations to reach a just and honourable settlement with the Japanese Canadian community.

BUT DIDN'T THE GOVERNMENT ACT LEGALLY?

The federal government was empowered by the War Measures Act to act as it deemed necessary to protect the security, defense, peace, order and welfare of Canada.

However, in a democracy we expect the government to act in good faith. Now that the government documents from the war years are open to the public, the real facts behind the common myths surrounding the internment of Japanese Canadians are available.

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THE SECURITY MYTH: The forced removal and internment of Japanese Canadians was a necessary security measure.

FACTS:

* Canada's top security advisors informed the government that the loyalty of Japanese Canadians was beyond question. The Chief of General Staff, Major General Ken Stuart, stated: "From the army point of view, I cannot see that Japanese Canadians constitute the slightest menace to national security."

* Many rumours about fifth column activity came from those who lobbied for the internment of Japanese Canadians. For example, Alderman Halford Wilson of the Vancouver City Council submitted a story to the Victoria DAILY COLONIST described by the Joint Service Committee, Pacific Command, as a "dangerous and entirely false report...of an alleged clash at Prince Rupert between personnel of the Canadian Navy and Japanese fishermen."

* In Hawaii, 160,000 people of Japanese ancestry (38% of the population) continued employment before and after Pearl Harbour in military and naval depots. No internment occurred and no active espionage or sabotage was ever reported.

* The security myth does not explain why the rights and freedoms of Japanese Canadians were abrogated for an additional 4 years after the war. They were not allowed to return to the West Coast of B.C. until April 1, 1949. By comparison, between 1942 and 1944, 35,000 Japanese Americans left detention camps after passing a loyalty review, and as of January 2, 1945 were officially allowed to return to their West Coast.

 THE PROTECTIVE CUSTODY MYTH: Japanese Canadians were interned to protect them against a violent and hostile B.C. public.

FACTS:

* In a democracy, it is the right of individuals to be protected by their government against violence and mob rule. The government's advisors rejected the false reasoning that the victims of racial violence should be interned. For example, H.L. Keenleyside, Assistant Under-Secretary of External Affairs, in referring to mob violence against Japanese Canadians, stated that "...the most severe penalties provided by the appropriate laws should be invoked against any person or persons who insist on going ahead with such subversive and disloyal activities."

* The myth ignores the fact that during the initial uprooting men were forcibly removed from their families, leaving women, children and the elderly as easy prey for the alleged hostile mobs.

* The hostility of the B.C. public has been exaggerated. An examination of the letters received by Prime Minister Mackenzie King before the decision to uproot indicates that public pressure to intern Japanese Canadians came from a well-orchestrated campaign from anti-Asian groups in B.C. with overlapping memberships.

THE EQUAL TREATMENT MYTH: The internment of Japanese Canadians was justified because of the abuse by Japan of British and Canadian prisoners of war in Hong Kong and other areas of war.

FACTS:

* This myth confuses nationality, ethnicity and citizenship. It falsely compares the wartime atrocities of a foreign nation, Japan, with Canada's treatment of ^{her} own citizens whose only "crime" was that they were "of Japanese ancestry."

* This myth was fabricated by white supremacists who argued that the loyalty of individuals is determined by their ethnic origin. Such a biased view was advanced by B.C. politicians such as Thomas Reid, Liberal M.P. for New Westminster in his statement calling for the expulsion of Japanese Canadians from Canada: "Take them back to Japan. They do not belong here, and there is only one solution to the problem. They cannot be assimilated as Canadians for no matter how long the Japanese remain in Canada they will always be Japanese."

THE "BLESSING IN DISGUISE" MYTH: The forced relocation of Japanese Canadians was a "blessing in disguise" because it led to their assimilation and acceptance in Canadian society.

FACTS:

* Japanese Canadians in B.C. were prevented from assimilating by laws prohibiting their participation in society. They could not vote, work in the public sector, nor enter professions such as law and pharmacy.

* Other ethnic groups, such as the Chinese, have achieved economic success and maintained strong and vital communities without having been dispersed.

* The economic success and assimilation of Japanese Canadians is due to their resourcefulness and diligence, not due to the injustices they suffered.

THE CONFISCATION AND LIQUIDATION OF PROPERTY "WITHOUT OWNER'S CONSENT": No myth exists because there is no conceivable justification for the sale of properties and

Japanese Canadian Citizens Association

4

belongings of Japanese Canadians without their consent.

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FACTS:

* The property and belongings were to be held "in trust" by the Custodian of Enemy Property.

* The sale of properties and belongings without the consent of Japanese Canadians had nothing to do with national security.

* The dispossession of Japanese Canadians destroyed their West Coast community and later justified their expulsion from B.C. through the federal government's dispersal policy. Some B.C. politicians saw in the internment the opportunity to rid the province of Japanese Canadians. For instance, Ian Mackenzie, Liberal M.P. for Vancouver Centre and Prime Minister Mackenzie King's chief advisor on Japanese Canadians, declared in his nomination speech on September 18, 1944, "Let our slogan be for British Columbia: 'No Japs from the Rockies to the seas.'"

* The money received ^{from} by the liquidation of properties and belongings, after deductions for fees to realtors and auctioneers, charges for storage and handling, was used to force Japanese Canadians to pay for their own internment.

Redress begins with an acknowledgment by the federal government of these injustices, followed by negotiations to reach a just settlement.

WHY IS TODAY'S SOCIETY RESPONSIBLE FOR PAST WRONGS?

* History is a continuum. A change in government does not erase obligations in international relations nor in domestic politics.

* We have already recognized compensation for past injustices by settling native Indian land claims.

* The events of World War II took place within living memory. Many of the Japanese Canadians are alive today, and former Prime Minister Trudeau was himself of voting age in 1942.

ISN'T REDRESS JUST A JAPANESE CANADIAN ISSUE?

NO, all members of our society stand to gain by redress for Japanese Canadians. No one is immune from acts of discrimination. To ignore past injustices is to condone them.

FACTS:

* Canada's top security divisions informed the government that the loyalty of Japanese Canadians was beyond question. The Chief of General Staff, Major General Ken Stuart, stated: "From the Army point of view, I cannot see that Japanese Canadians constitute the slightest menace to national security."

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