CHALLENGING RACIST “BRITISH COLUMBIA”

150 YEARS AND COUNTING

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**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 Nuu-chah-nulth word for “Where the winds blow in all directions”. After surviving residential school, Sanford Williams attended the Gitannmax 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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**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
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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.
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 racisms 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.
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...
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. A “colour-blind” approach is no longer acceptable.

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 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. 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.

"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."

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 Nuu-chah-nulth 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.”

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 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.

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 Nuu-chah-nulth 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.

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: Dozens of Chinese workers came to Yuquot...
(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. 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.

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.” 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?

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.

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.”

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 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. 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.

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.’ 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 Lhat’sa2in (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 Lhat’sa2in, 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.

“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. 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." 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.” 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.” And, as we demonstrate in the following pages, Indigenous resistance to colonization of their lands intensified.

**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. 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. 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.

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.
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; and
(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 2SLOBTQIA 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 aptitude for 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, administrating 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

In March 1911, Peter Kelly (Haida) and nearly a hundred Chiefs gathered in Victoria to present a statement26 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.27

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, or festivals. Through this amendment, the government specifically targeted First Nations in the West, declaring illegal the “celebration of the Indigenous cultures, or festivals. Through this amendment, the government specifically targeted First Nations in the West, declaring illegal the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlatch’ or the Indian dance festival known as the ‘Potlach

[Image 658x135 to 910x361]
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 decisions 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

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, the late-nineteenth-century 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-chah-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 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

In 1926, the Allied Tribes petitioned the Canadian government for an inquiry into the Indian residential school era. Despite this request, 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 disposessed Indigenous peoples of their lands, taken their children, and denied them access to food security, they then forbade them access to the courts.

Indian 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.
In 1969, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s government aimed to quickly assimilate First Nations by abolishing the Indian Act and converting reserve lands to private property. This policy initiative, like many others before, aimed to reduce the identities and interests of Indigenous peoples and communities. 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.C.

In 1970, the UBCIC issued a Declaration of Indian Rights: The BC Indian Position Paper (bit.ly/ZXkuae).

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, 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 (Neskantah) 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, which broadly recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights (and those that may be so acquired). 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.

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. 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.

Primary Source

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’k’w/Chet’lemel’set’h’ First Nations, Toquaht Nation, Uchucklesaht Tribe, and Yuvulit First Nations); and 2016 Tla’amin Final Agreement.

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. 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. 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.
Joseph Truth to Acting Colonial Secretary, August 28, 1867, Papers on Indian Land Question, 1850–1875, 42. Italics in original.

Victoria, Privy Council (UK), British Columbia Terms of Union (UK), 1871, reprinted in Revised Statutes of Canada 1985, App. II, No. 10.

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Daniel Marshall, "The Return of Chief Tsilimulpi’s Ceremonial Blanket," The Orca (July 6, 2019), accessed November 6, 2020, bit.ly/3m5fSaW


See Harris, Making Native Space, 226.


"Project of Heart: Illuminating the Hidden History of Indian Residential Schools in BC," BC Teachers’ Federation, 2015, accessed November 6, 2020, bit.ly/2lO7t3W


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Submitted by Professor Emerita Wendy Wickwire. Her award-winning book, At the Bridge: James Tett and an Anthropology of Reconciliation, was published by UBC Press in 2019.

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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.\(^2\)

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.

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.\(^4\)

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.
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. 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.”

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 property within the boundaries of the areas that is 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

LITERARY MOMENT
Among the first to arrive was Priscilla Stewart [dates unknown], who penned this poem 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.”

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” 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

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.
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 Immediate 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, between him and his religious colleague the Rev. M. MacFie.” Mr. 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.

In the fall of 1859, a Select School was opened by the Sisters of St. Ann. “Some parents of African descent applied 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.”

Emil Suro, 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.”

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.”

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. 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 1911-1224) 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. Though frictions existed between some Chinese and Indigenous peoples, they also “formed great friendships.”

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! 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.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE Victoria’s Chinatown: A Gateway to the Past and Present of Chinese Canadians

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, un surveyed, 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.

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


3 Kilian, Go Do Some Great Thing, 14–19.


7 “Coloured Emigrants,” British Colonist, February 5, 1859.


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.


18 Fraser Corridor Heritage Landscape Project, accessed December 14, 2020, bit.ly/3fTGZ3U.

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 Governors,” British Daily Colonist, April 5, 1864, 3.


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.
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. 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. 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." 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." 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." 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." 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. The bill received royal assent that October. 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."

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. 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. 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 be entitled to vote.”

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 Macinnes, 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 Sidhoo, 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.

**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 II 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!

**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 Chen, Esther Fung, Henry Lee, Joseph Leong, and Gordon Cumynow 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.
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.” Federally, Indigenous people could vote but only if they gave up their status as members of their communities. Squamish (Sqwxw7mesh) 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.” 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.”

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.

Velma Chen

Velma Chen 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.” Chen 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.

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. 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. 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

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/3d7LUz2). 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.
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.
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.” A leading merchant, Tai Sing, and eleven others sued the government. 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. 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.

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.

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.

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
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

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.

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.

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

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.9

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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.


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." 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**

When Gurdit Singh chartered the Komopoto 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. 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. 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 newly formed Ghadar Party in the Pacific Northwest, led many activists in South Asian communities in North America to depart for India. 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.

**LITERARY MOMENT**

The sense of loss and longing of separated partners is captured in this poem by Kuldirp 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 putting 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.
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 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 further pressure on the federal government to restrict Asian immigration. 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.19

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, 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.20

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.19

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.22

| Origins of Immigrants Arriving in Canada, 1946-1953 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| European | 71,410 | 63,627 | 126,316 | 93,969 | 71,714 | 190,958 | 165,333 | 166,037 |
| ‘Other’ | 309 | 500 | 498 | 1,248 | 2,198 | 3,433 | 3,355 | 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.*
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, as well as to the Sri Lankan (Tamil) refugees that arrived in 2010. 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.

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, canny workers or fishers, lumber workers or market gardeners. Many became active in the labour movement, including the famed Vancouver Longshoremen Local 256 composed mainly of Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish members formed in 1903.


**Asian Canadians: Cheap Labour?**

Asian 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.”

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.


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.

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.

**Khaltsa 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 1886 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.

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

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**COMMUNITY RESOURCE**


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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, our 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 men there, very fine old men – Sam and Joe. My grandma.

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 lifesaving 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.26

ENDNOTES

5. On early arrivals from South Asia, see Sikh Heritage Museum, canadiansikhheritage.ca/. See also South Asian Canadian Historical Sites, bit.ly/3hqHz
7. Lily Siwesom Chow, Blood and Sweat over the Railway Tracks (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC and UBC INSTRCC, 2014)
17. See Wickberg et al., From Chino to Canada, 138–44.
20. Florence Chia-Ying Yeh, Ode to the Lotus (Vancouver: SUCCESS, 2007), 79.
25. “Testimonial Meeting on the Oriental,” IWII Hall, Cordova Street, March 4, 1924, Survey on Race Relations (Box/Folder 2a, Interview 16).
27. Henry Yu, Journeys of Hope: Challenging Discrimination and Building on Vancouver Chinatown’s Legacies (Vancouver: WePress, 2018), x.
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.”

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. For too long, silence has shrouded the fact that thousands took advantage of the dispossession for personal gain. A reckoning is long overdue.

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.
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.” 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.”

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 arrests, detention, and an uprising at the Vancouver waterfront. Immediately after Canada declared war on Japan, Ottawa that lobbied strenuously for the forcible removal of Japanese Canadians. Opposition from Lt. Gen. Maurice Burton, the BC Security Commission, and cabinet minister George S. Pearson led a delegation to Ottawa that ultimately led to 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.

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 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.” She emphasized that the CCF had “no intention of lending themselves to this system of race hatreds, or any other Nazi-inspired hatreds.”

But 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 cove, 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.

After returning to the coast, Shiokazu Matsumura eventually found and bought back his beloved 36-foot, double-ender (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.

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.

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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.

Some people, including Laura Jamieson of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), spoke out against racism directed at Japanese Canadians. 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.” She emphasized that the CCF had “no intention of lending themselves to this system of race hatreds, or any other Nazi-inspired hatreds.”

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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 Søyokaze owned by Shigekazu Matsunaga on Quadra Island), and the shuttering of three Japanese-language newspapers, even though one, Nikkan Minshu (Daily People), had been critical of Japanese Canadian writers in the 1930s and 1940s. It was an ugly confrontation.10

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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 Shingi 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.

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.

**Nisei Mass Evacuation Group**

Young Nisei men, led by Fujikazu Tanaka, Robert Shimizu, 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.

**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.

**‘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.’”**

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.”

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.”

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 houses, 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.”23 Tohru Iwasaki and other property owners wrote hundreds of letters to the government protesting the selling of their property.24 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 Gavin Mount on Salt Spring Island took advantage of the situation to take over Tohru Iwasaki’s 598-acre property at a ludicrously low price and then made large profits by subdividing and selling it off in chunks.25 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.26

There were exceptions.

■ The Nisga’a 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.27 Later, heredity 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.28 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.

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 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 Soyohaze.

However, of an estimated 3,000 Japanese Canadians who lived on Vancouver Island, only a handful 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.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

UNDERSTANDING JAPANESE AMERICAN AND JAPANESE CANADIAN EXPERIENCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNITED STATES</th>
<th>CANADA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uprooted under Executive Order 9066, put into camps, legal challenges filed in courts</td>
<td>Uprooted by Cabinet Order-in-Council 428, never apprised of legal rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14,000 Japanese Americans serve in 442nd Infantry, most decorated unit in Army</td>
<td>Japanese Canadians barred from Canadian Armed Forces, except for 100 translators in S-20 only permitted to enlist after pressure from UK and Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detention costs paid by government</td>
<td>Japanese Canadians must pay for detention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government refrains from seizing properties</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 1944: Mitsuye Endo successfully challenges detention in Supreme Court, authorizes ending of incarceration</td>
<td>In 1945, Japanese Canadians forced to leave Canada or move east of Rockies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Americans return to coast in 1945</td>
<td>Japanese Canadian barred from British Columbia until 1949, four years after war’s end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 2/3rd of Japanese Americans return to coast</td>
<td>Less than 1/3 of Japanese Canadians return to coast, most remain “East of the Rockies”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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.

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 multicultural 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

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.

1949 that culminated in the Redress settlement of 1988.27

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 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.48

ENDNOTES


2 Teachers’ resource guides on Japanese Canadian history are available online at japancanadianhistory.net. Listen to Japanese Canadians relate their stories via SFU’s Japanese Canadian Oral History Collection, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/3yKZk2 (not accessible to public)


5 Muriel Kitagawa, This is My Own: Letters to Wes and Other Writings on Japanese Canadians, 1947–1949 (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985), 71.


14 Kitagawa, This Is My Own, 116.


16 See Nikkei Stories of Steveston – Hideyo Hyodzu on Storyhive, accessed December 15, 2020, bit.ly/3mTGHw

17 A. MacNamara, “Memorandum to the Minister of Labour,” February 9, 1943, LAC, MG32II, B-5, 67-29, 1. See also Frank Moriartusi and the Ghost Town Teachers Historical Society, Teaching in Canadian Exile (Toronto: The Ghost Town Teachers’ Society, 2001).


20 See the collection of protest letters held by the Custodian of Enemy Property, Vancouver Office, available through the Heritage-Canadianna portal at bit.ly/3mS85o. See also Jordon Stanger-Ross, Nicholas Blomley, and the Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective, “My Land is Worth a Million Dollars”: How Japanese-Canadians Contested Their Dispossession in the 1940s, Law and History Review 35, no. 3 (August 2017): 711–51.


22 See Brian Smallshaw’s recent publication, As If They Were the Enemy: The Dispossession of Japanese Canadians on Saltspring Island (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria, 2020), available for free as an e-publication at bit.ly/2X23lCR.


30 Written with information provided by Lynn Deustcher Kobayashi.

Endnotes
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.

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.

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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.

### POPULATION OF BC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Racialized</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>25,039</td>
<td>1,111,733</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

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**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
Recent efforts by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Actions are having a profound impact. 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.

Many people today are open to change. As author Bev Sellers 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.”

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 rededication of resources in every sector of society if we are to meet the challenges ahead. It will require many people, 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.

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. In particular, systemic racism continues and imposes major impediments for Indigenous peoples of BC:

- youth suicide rates are triple non-Indigenous rates; 
- life expectancy is 8 years less than non-Indigenous people;
- mortality rates are nearly double;
- suicide rates are triple non-Indigenous rates;
- 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;
- moral/religious discrimination;
- instrumental barriers that derive from systemic racism.

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, Filipinos, Latinx, Arab, Southeast Asian, Western 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.

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. And anti-Semitic incidents are still occurring.

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 communities, within the health care 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. 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 is racism that’s institutionalized in the building. There’s micro aggressions that happen here every day,” she stated in her resignation speech.

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

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

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 $90.1 million between 2002 and 2014 on multiculturalism and anti-racism education.

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. The decision, prompted by complaints from Lekwungen representatives attending reconciliation discussions at city hall, created a storm of controversy.

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.

ENDNOTES

1. These figures based on Wilson Duff, The Indian History of British Columbia (Victoria: BC Provincial Museum, 1952, 1973), 44; W. Peter Ward, The Japanese in Canada (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1983); 7; Harold Palens, Ethnicity and Politics in Canada since Confederation (Ottawa: Historical Association, 1991), Table 1; and Peter S. Li, Cultural Diversity in Canada: The Social Construction of Racial Differences (Ottawa: Canada Department of Justice Strategic Issues Series, 2000).


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.

DECOLONIZATON 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 Sikh 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 manifests 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 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.

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 inaccuracies. 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.

GLOSSARY

ENDNOTES

CONTRIBUTORS

Co-Authors

Nicholas XEMŦOLTW̱ Claxton is an assistant professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and elected chief of Tsawout Nation (WSÁNEĆ). 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 story-telling 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 SaltSpring Island. His book on the dispossession of Japanese Canadians on SaltSpring Island, As If They Were the Enemy, was published in 2020.

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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

PUBLISHERS

Asian Canadians on Vancouver Island: Race, Indigeneity and the Transpacific (ACVI), University of Victoria

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
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.

This resource could not have been produced without the active support of Shannon Dash (Director), Emira Mears (Associate Director), and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (BC Office). We are very grateful to have CCPA(BC) as co-publisher and extend our appreciation to Jean Kavanagh (Manager, Media and Public Relations) for her work with the media. Thank you to Rachael Otkol and the Board of the BC Black History Awareness Society for their active support during the final editing of the resource. For their inspiration and wonderful artwork, we thank master carver Ahtsik-sta Qwayachiik (Sanford Williams) and partner Maralana Williams. We are deeply indebted to the reviewers of an earlier draft of this resource, including Sleydo/Molly Wickham of the Gitdím’t’en checkpoint; Henry Yu, Chris Lee, Handel Kashope Wright (all at UBC); Wendy Wickwire and Rita Kaur Dhamoon of the Pacific Canada Heritage Centre-Museum of Migration; Jennifer Iredale, retired Director of the Province of BC’s Heritage Branch; Sherrí Kajiwara, Director/Curator of the Nikkei National Museum; Joy Masuhara, social justice activist; Art Miki, past president of the National Association of Japanese Canadians.

Our sincere appreciation to Karen Aird and Suzanne Gessner of the First Peoples’ Cultural Council and Marianne Nicolson for their support and use of their artwork, we thank master carver Ahtsik-sta Qwayachiik (Sanford Williams) and partner Maralana Williams. We are deeply indebted to the reviewers of an earlier draft of this resource, including Sleydo/Molly Wickham of the Gitdím’t’en checkpoint; Henry Yu, Chris Lee, Handel Kashope Wright (all at UBC); Wendy Wickwire and Rita Kaur Dhamoon of the Pacific Canada Heritage Centre-Museum of Migration; Jennifer Iredale, retired Director of the Province of BC’s Heritage Branch; Sherrí Kajiwara, Director/Curator of the Nikkei National Museum; Joy Masuhara, social justice activist; Art Miki, past president of the National Association of Japanese Canadians.

We are grateful to the many people and institutions who supported this project by providing us with visual and artistic media, including Tommy Tao who granted permission to use the Florence Chia-Ying Yeh poem, and to Lee Maracle and Janisse Browning for allowing us to publish their work in this resource. We thank those who provided us with photos, media, and research support, including the Sikh Heritage Museum, Cynthia Kent, Driftpile Cree Nation, the Langham Cultural Society, the Royal BC Museum and Archives, and many others.

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*, they raised important questions and insights that informed the project.

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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 challengeracistbc.ca