

## Context card

# Case study: Japanese Canadians

Japanese Canadians have lived in Canada since the 1870s. Most of them lived in British Columbia (BC), where they worked as fishers, farmers and business owners. Racism against Asians led the BC government to ban Japanese Canadians from voting in provincial elections in 1895. This also excluded them from voting in federal elections.

When Canada was at war with Japan during the Second World War, Japanese Canadians living in BC lost other democratic rights. They were moved to internment camps and barred from voting even if they were living outside BC. It wasn't until 1948 that Japanese Canadians were granted full federal voting rights.

In the years that followed, Japanese Canadians advocated for an apology. In 1988, the federal government formally apologized for past injustices.



Source: CWM 20150279-001\_p21, George Metcalf Archival Collection, Canadian War Museum

# 1877

Japanese  
Canadians

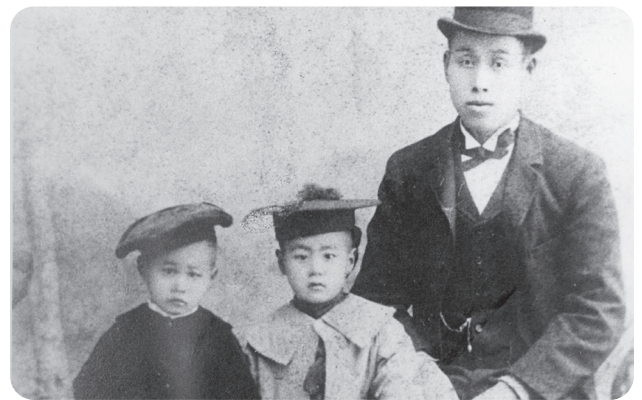


Source: Image C-07918 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives

Japanese people begin to arrive in Canada. Many settle in BC and become British subjects like most other Canadians. They then have the right to vote in provincial and federal elections if they are men, age 21 or older, and own property.

# 1895

Japanese  
Canadians



Source: JCCC Original Photographic Collection, Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, 2001.4.119

The BC government passes a law that bans Japanese Canadians from voting in provincial elections. Provinces each make their own voters lists that are also used in federal elections. Since they are not on the provincial voters list, Japanese Canadians living in BC cannot vote in provincial or federal elections.

# 1898

Japanese  
Canadians



Source: Samuel J. Jarvis, Library and Archives Canada, C-001977

Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier's government makes changes to the federal election law to give voting rights to some people who are excluded at the provincial level. In theory, Japanese Canadians living in BC can now vote in federal elections, but they must make a special effort to get on the voters list. They are not treated the same as other Canadians.

Japanese Canadians are still denied the provincial vote in BC.

# 1900

Japanese  
Canadians



Source: Yoshimaru Abe Collection, Nikkei National Museum, 2013.54.4

Tomekichi Homma fights the BC government in court for the right to vote in provincial elections.

The case goes to the Supreme Court of Canada, which rules in his favour. However, this decision is overruled by the highest court of appeal in Britain. It upholds the legal right of a province to decide who can vote. Japanese Canadians are still denied the provincial vote in BC.

# 1917

Japanese  
Canadians

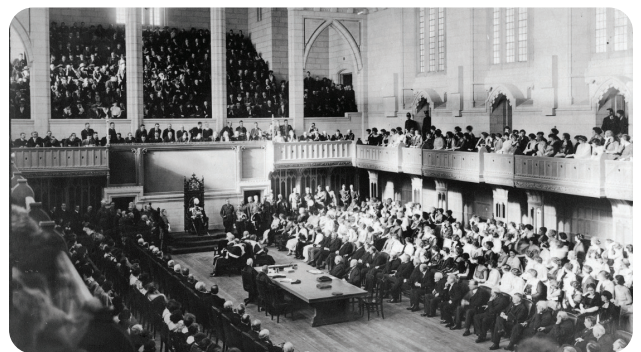


Source: Masumi Mitsui Collection, Nikkei National Museum, 2014.10.1.10

During the First World War, Japanese Canadians join the military to fight for Canada. These soldiers and all Canadians serving in the military overseas can vote in the 1917 federal election.

# 1920

Japanese  
Canadians



Source: Library and Archives Canada, PA-030603

Parliament changes the federal election law. A person cannot vote in a federal election if their province excludes them for racial reasons. Japanese Canadians in BC cannot vote in either federal or provincial elections.

The few Japanese Canadians living in other provinces have the right to vote in federal elections.

# 1936

Japanese  
Canadians



Source: Isami (Sam) Okamoto Collection, Nikkei National Museum, 2000.14.1.1.1

The Japanese Canadian Citizens League sends a delegation to the House of Commons. The group includes a teacher, a dentist, a life insurance agent and a professor. They were all born in Vancouver, BC. They speak before a special committee and request the right to vote in federal elections.

Voting rights for Japanese Canadians living in BC do not change.

# 1941

Japanese  
Canadians



Source: Tak Toyota, Library and Archives Canada, C-046350

In the Second World War, Japan attacks Canada's allies in Asia and the Pacific. Canada then declares war with Japan. Japanese Canadians are now seen as a security threat, and racism gets worse. The Government of Canada orders all Japanese Canadians to be moved away from the BC coast. They are confined in internment camps.

# 1944

Japanese  
Canadians



Source: Library and Archives Canada, e010695747-v8

Canada is still at war with Japan. Many Japanese Canadians from BC are placed in internment camps in other provinces where they technically have voting rights. In response, Parliament changes the federal election law. No Japanese Canadians from BC are allowed to vote in federal elections, no matter where they live.

# 1948

Japanese  
Canadians



Source: Canadian Centennial Collection, Nikkei National Museum, 2010.23.2.4.666

After the Second World War, Parliament removes all restrictions on Japanese Canadians' federal right to vote. BC removes provincial voting restrictions one year later.

# X 1988

## Japanese Canadians



Source: *The Canadian Press / Ron Poling*

The Canadian government formally apologizes to Japanese Canadians for denying them their civil and democratic rights.

Here Prime Minister Brian Mulroney signs the apology next to Art Miki, President of the National Association of Japanese Canadians.