

Context card

Case study: Japanese Canadians

Japanese Canadians have lived in Canada since the 1870s. In the past, most of them lived in British Columbia (BC). They worked as fishers, farmers and business owners.

Racism against Asian Canadians was common. The BC government banned Japanese Canadians from voting in provincial elections in 1895. This also meant that they could not vote in federal elections.

Canada fought with Japan during the Second World War. During the war, Japanese Canadians in BC lost even more democratic rights. They were moved to internment camps away from the Pacific Coast. They could not vote even if they were living outside of BC.

Japanese Canadians were allowed to vote in federal elections in 1948. In the years that followed, Japanese Canadians asked for an apology. In 1988, the federal government formally apologized for past wrongs.



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

1877

Japanese
Canadians



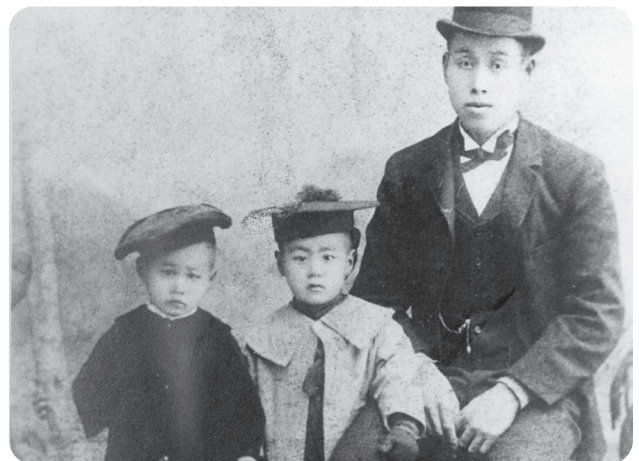
Source: Image C-07918 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives

Japanese people begin to arrive in Canada. Many settle in British Columbia (BC). Like all Canadians, they have the right to vote in provincial and federal elections if they:

- are male
- are at least 21 years old
- own property

1895

Japanese
Canadians



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

The BC government passes a law. It bans Japanese Canadians from voting in provincial elections. This means that Japanese Canadians living in BC cannot vote in provincial or federal elections.

1900

Japanese
Canadians



Source: Yoshimaru Abe Collection, Nikkei National Museum, 2013.54.4

Tomekichi Homma fights the BC government for the right to vote in provincial elections. The Supreme Court of Canada rules in his favour. This decision is later overruled in Britain.

Japanese Canadians are still not allowed to 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 Canadian military can vote in the 1917 election.

1920

Japanese
Canadians



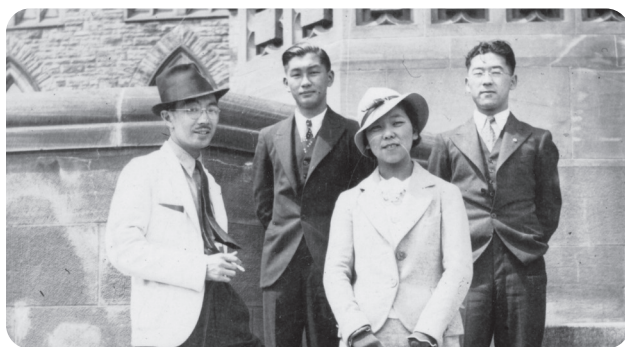
Source: Library and Archives Canada, PA-030603

Parliament changes the federal election law. Japanese Canadians in BC still cannot vote in federal or provincial elections.

The few Japanese Canadians in other provinces can now vote in federal elections.

1936

Japanese
Canadians



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

Members of the Japanese Canadian Citizens League go to the House of Commons. They speak before a special committee and ask for the right to vote. The group includes a teacher, a dentist, a salesperson and a professor. They were all born in Vancouver, BC.

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. Many Canadians see Japanese Canadians as possible spies. Racism against Japanese Canadians gets worse.

The Government of Canada orders all Japanese Canadians to be moved from the BC coast. They are forced to live in camps away from everyone else.

1948

Japanese
Canadians



Source: Canadian Centennial Collection, Nikkei National Museum, 2010.23.2.4.666

The Second World War is over. Parliament grants all Japanese Canadians the right to vote in federal elections. BC grants the right to vote in provincial elections one year later.

1988

Japanese
Canadians



Source: The Canadian Press / Ron Poling

The Canadian government 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.