



JAPANESE INTERNMENT

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Japanese Internment

Japanese internment was introduced in Canada in 1942 by Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Japanese internment is an extremely dark moment in Canadian history. It called for the imprisonment of Japanese people, the confiscation and selling of their possessions and the separation and destruction of families and childhoods for many.

Change and Continuity

Change and continuity

Since the time that Japanese people started to immigrate to Canada they have been discriminated against and have faced racism and discrimination. The internment of Japanese people in Canada in World War II is no exception to this.

Even before the war, racism towards Asian people was still very prominent. Japanese were excluded from voting and conscription and thus were unable to contribute to their country in two meaningful ways, even though the majority of Japanese people in Canada at the time were of the British Commonwealth or born in Canada. As the war went on, white people began to accuse Japanese people of being spies. They did this to get rid of their “competitors”. These white people wanted to get rid of the Japanese people. They used the war to pressure the government to take action.

The idea of rounding up those of European descent (German, Italian) was not nearly as popular among people as the internment of the Japanese people in Canada during World War II. The pressure on the government to relocate Japanese Canadians was so strong that, even though the RCMP found a lack of evidence to suggest even a small threat, Japanese citizens were still taken to roads camps, sugar beet projects, POW Camps, or isolated towns away from other people. In these places there was insufficient living space and food; the living conditions were terrible.

Cause and Consequence

Cause and consequence

As the war progressed there was growing suspicion of Japanese people in Canada. This is because Japan was a major enemy of Canada's. The bombing of Pearl Harbour in late 1941 was the tipping point. In early 1942, under the War Measures Act in the name of national security, Prime minister Mackenzie King ordered the removal of all adult males of Japanese ancestry from the coast.

The internment of Japanese Canadians allowed the Canadian government to take away the possessions away from Japanese people and separate them from their families. When internment was enacted, it confirmed the suspicions of white Canadians and backed up the anti-Japanese movement in Canada.

The lives of Japanese Canadians were completely controlled by the government. With no possessions, family and an endless amount of hard labour, life was hard. Mass confinement of families that did manage to stay together was just as bad. Many families would be housed in a single apartment that should have housed a single, small family of three or four.

After the war, many Japanese people were deported back to Japan; a place that many had never seen before. If they chose to stay, they had to completely restart their life as they had little to no possessions left. Many Japanese were fishermen and after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, all of their boats were confiscated and sold.

Historical Significance and Ethical Judgement

Historical significance

Japanese internment is historically significant because it forcibly removed virtually all people of Japanese heritage from their homes and destroyed so many lives. It is a dark moment in Canadian history that needs to be remembered.

Ethical judgement

The internment of Japanese Canadians is a prime example of people taking advantage of tragedies. It also shows how people can use hate and fear to justify things. Although the fear of an enemy nation during war was understandable, the Japanese Canadians that were removed from their homes and were detained had done nothing wrong. There was evidence to show that the Japanese Canadians that lived in British Columbia were not a threat, as said by the RCMP when Japanese fisherman boats were confiscated, but they were still detained. Putting innocent Japanese people into internment camps, even in a time of war, is wrong. I believe that it occurred because the bombing of Pearl Harbour had finally given racist people in the west coast a reason to get rid of Japanese people.

I had a chance to visit Greenwood, an abandoned mining town where Japanese people were housed during internment, during the summer of 2020. I went with my friend and both our families. We got a tour from a friend's grandfather who had lived in the internment camps in his childhood. He talked about the terrible living conditions and lack of food in the cramped apartment complex that he had lived in. After we took a tour around the small town, we went to a Japanese Internment Museum and learned more in depth about what had happened during the war.

Coincidentally, I have also been to many war museums in Okinawa. I go there every year (aside from COVID years) during the summer to visit my family. The war museums show the brutal reality of the war. They also aim to show the side of civilians and the native Okinawans that did not want anything to do with the war. At school on memorial day (in Japan) we were shown a movie about children escaping from war. It was very effective in showing how innocence is crushed during war.

As someone who is Japanese native Okinawan (and half Canadian) myself, I have seen many perspectives of innocent civilians living in a time of war. I don't think that the Internment of Japanese-Canadians was just.

Sources

- [Internment of Japanese Canadians | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)
- [Japanese Internment Camps: WWII, Life & Conditions – HISTORY](#)
- [Roots of Racism — UW Libraries \(washington.edu\)](#)