

CHC2P Unit 3: 1939-1959: War and Peace

Activity 6: Treatment of Japanese Canadians

Overview

In this activity, you will examine conscription crisis in Canada during World War II and the use of "Zombies" in the Canadian army, nearing the end of the war.

Lesson

The War Measures Act during WWII

In times of national emergency, such as war, democratic governments often take away some of their citizens' rights in order to protect the well-being of the entire Democracy. The War Measures Act allowed the government to do certain things without asking for permission from the elected representatives in Parliament. In trying to win the war and to protect Canadians, the government did the following:

1. moved workers to essential industries such as munitions production;
2. rationed food and essential products such as gasoline;
3. conducted searches of private property without a search warrant;
4. imposed wage and price controls;
5. censored news and information;
6. and seized land.

For example, in 1942, the federal government seized one third of the reserve land that belonged to the Kettle and Stony Point Band along Lake Huron. The land was used as a military training facility and was never returned to the owners.

Internment



In early 1942, the Canadian government decided to forcibly remove 23,000 Japanese Canadians living along the coastline of British Columbia, and to place them in detention camps or internment camps in the interior of the province.

This action was taken under the War Measures Act, supposedly to protect the security of Canada. No Japanese Canadian was ever charged with any act of sabotage or disloyalty to Canada. Moreover, about 14,000 of the Japanese Canadians placed in the camps were born in Canada. Many spoke no Japanese and had no specific attachment to Japan.

Racism



Racism against Asian Canadians had been present in British Columbia for many years. Some other Canadians saw Asian immigrants as strange people and possible threats to their jobs. They pressured the Canadian government to restrict the entry of people from Japan and China.

In the 1920's only 150 Japanese were permitted to enter Canada each year. Also, Asian Canadians were not permitted to vote or to become lawyers or pharmacists.

After the Japanese attack first on Pearl Harbour and then on Hong Kong (with its 2000 Canadian defenders), hatred against Japan boiled over. Japanese Canadians were viewed as possible traitors and security threats.

Seizure

The federal government reacted by seizing all fishing boats, cars, radios, and cameras belonging to Japanese Canadians. Soon after, their homes and other belongings were taken away and sold at public auctions. Some families were separated, and life in the detention camps was difficult. After the war, almost 4,000 were forced to go to Japan. Of these, more than half were Canadian-born and two-thirds were Canadian citizens.

Japanese Canadians did not receive the right to vote until 1949. They did not receive any compensation for their losses until 1988. The father of hockey star Paul Kariya was born in a British Columbia internment camp during World War II. Starting at age 6, David Suzuki lived for three years in a similar internment camp.

Assignment

1. The War Measures Act allowed the Canadian government to do what 6 things during the war?
2. In 1942, how many Japanese Canadians were transported to internment camps?
3. List 5 items the Canadian government seized from Japanese Canadians.
4. Japanese Canadians experienced so much hatred or racism from their fellow Canadians during the war-- list 3 reasons or examples.