

CHC2P Unit 4: 1960s-1980s: A Nation's Challenges

Activity 6: Canadian Immigration before 1945

Overview

In this activity, you will examine the arrival and treatment of immigrants to Canada before World War II.

Lesson

Multiculturalism in Canada



In 1971, Canada became the first country in the world to officially adopt multiculturalism.

This policy provided for programs and services to support ethnocultural associations and to help individuals overcome barriers to their full participation in Canadian society. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, take pride in their ancestry, and

have a sense of belonging.

Canadian multiculturalism is based in the fact that Canada is a country of immigrants.

Immigration to the Prairies

Canada has received immigrants for most of its history. At the beginning of the 20th century, the country welcomed hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, Scandinavians, Americans, and Eastern Europeans to help fill up the vast prairie regions with population.

Religious minorities such as Doukhobors, Hutterites, and Mennonites were granted protection from the persecutions encountered in their homelands.

On the prairies, homesteaders lived miles from tiny towns and were isolated from their neighbours. Women worked in the heat and the dust beside their husbands, breaking the earth into chunks of sod, which they stacked up to create their first homes, their "soddies".

Early Discrimination Against Certain Immigrants

The profile of the Canadian immigrant in the early 20th century contained a predominantly white face. Non-whites were not actively recruited, and, at times, were blatantly turned away. 15,000 Chinese were brought to Canada in the 1880's to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway, but were denied citizenship.

Japanese immigration to British Columbia was deliberately limited by the government. Chinese immigrants faced a head tax of up to \$500, and Sikh immigrants were told that they needed to make a "continuous" or direct journey to Canada - something that no shipping company provided.

The ship Komagata Maru in Vancouver harbour, May, 1914. 376 Sikh immigrants on board the Komagata Maru were barred entry into Canada at Vancouver despite the fact they all had valid British passports. The ship was sent back to India.

Waves of Immigration



Thousands of free Black people had been among the 18th century refugees from the American Revolution who settled in Nova Scotia. Prior to the American Civil War, runaway slaves found refuge in Upper Canada (Ontario).

However, during the massive waves of immigration in the first half of the 20th century, people of colour were deliberately excluded. So also, for the most part, were Jewish people, including the time period when they were most in need of refuge.

Full citizenship was not granted to certain ethnic groups. In British Columbia - where the vast majority of Asian Canadians lived - Chinese and Japanese Canadians were not granted the full right to vote until 1947 and 1949 respectively. Exclusion from the voting lists was used as a pretext to prevent employment in certain professions such as lawyer, accountant and pharmacist.

Assignment

1. Using the internet conduct further research on the Doukhobor immigrants. Present the information in a well-constructed paragraph.
2. Conduct further research on the Komagata Maru incident and present the information in a well-constructed paragraph.
3. List three reasons why immigrants came to Canada prior to 1945.
4. List three ways in which the Canadian government discouraged certain immigrants from coming to Canada.
5. The following is part of a speech by Prime Minister Mackenzie King in the House of Commons on May 1, 1947. The series of dots (....) are places where unnecessary words have been removed from the original speech. Read this primary document and then answer the questions that follow.

The policy of the government is to foster the growth of the population of Canada by the encouragement of immigration....

. . .as respects immigration from Europe, the emphasis for the present should be on the admission of the relatives of persons who are already in Canada, and on assisting in the resettlement of displaced persons and refugees.

.... Selection officers will . . . consider applicants for entry into Canada, examine them on a basis of suitability and physical fitness, and make arrangements for their orderly movement and placement.... In taking these steps, the government is seeking to ensure that the displaced persons admitted to Canada are of a type likely to make good citizens.

. . . much has been said about discrimination. I wish to make it quite clear that Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens. It is not a "fundamental human right" of any alien to enter Canada. It is a privilege. . .

There will, I am sure, be general agreement with the view that the people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population. Large-scale immigration from the orient [Asia] would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population. ... (Source: House of Commons Debates, May 1, 1947, pp. 2644-6)

6. According to Prime Minister Mackenzie King, why does Canada want immigrants?
7. According to Prime Minister Mackenzie King, what are three characteristics of the type of immigrants Canada was looking for in 1947?
8. As we have learned previously, bias may be described as a particular point of view that is one-sided. What particular bias does Prime Minister Mackenzie King express in his speech?