



SUPPLY
LINE

Forced Relocation: The Japanese Canadian Story

The outbreak of war with Japan in December 1941 led to serious consequences for Japanese Canadians. In 1942, Canada's government forcibly removed them from the Pacific coast. Their property was seized and sold off, and many were relocated to camps in the interior of British Columbia.

Background

Japanese and other Asian immigrants had long faced prejudice and racism in Canada. Growing international tensions in the 1930s made things worse, especially after Japanese clashes with China led to open war in 1937.

After Japan entered the Second World War in December 1941, many people and politicians pressured the federal government to act against Japanese Canadians. False rumours suggested that, through spying or sabotage, they might help Japanese forces attack Canada.

Relocation and Dispossession

Japanese Canadians had already been forced to register with the federal government in March 1941. In early 1942, pressure from politicians and the public led the government to use the *War Measures Act* to uproot and relocate some 21,000 Japanese Canadians living on the Pacific coast.

Men were relocated first, starting in January 1942. Some were sent to road-construction camps.

Men who resisted separation from their families were sent to **internment** camps in Ontario.

In February, the government ordered the relocation of all Japanese Canadians living within 160 kilometres of the Pacific coast. After sending many to crude settlements – sometimes called “camps” – inland, it seized their homes, businesses and most of their belongings. These were sold to fund the camps.

The Camps

In the camps – often called internment camps – some people lived in renovated older buildings. Others were housed in quickly built shacks. Overcrowding was a problem. Homes had little or no insulation, making them uncomfortable in winter. Adults worked when jobs were available. Children attended

poorly equipped makeshift schools, and most of their teachers had limited training.

Some Japanese Canadians signed contracts to work on sugar-beet farms on the Prairies. They lived and worked under harsh conditions. Some wealthier families were allowed to live in “self-supporting projects” that they paid for.

Limited Options

In early 1945, the federal government presented two options to Japanese Canadians who were still in camps in British Columbia. They could move eastwards to other areas of Canada or be expelled to Japan. Almost 6,900 adults agreed to expulsion, which the government called “repatriation”. These decisions also affected about 3,500 children. Public protests and legal

challenges made the government end these plans in 1947. By then, almost 4,000 people had been expelled.

Few Japanese Canadians returned to British Columbia. Restrictions on their ability to live near the Pacific were not lifted until 1949. Most rebuilt their lives in other parts of Canada.

Government Recognition and Redress

Japanese Canadians later campaigned for redress, asking the federal government to apologize and try to make things right. Negotiations led to a formal government apology on 22 September 1988. It included

compensation for survivors and the creation of a community fund. Japanese Canadians who had lost their citizenship or had been expelled after the war could get their citizenship back, as could their descendants.

Vocabulary

Internment:

The imprisonment of people, including enemy nationals, usually without criminal charges, in wartime. It is often used to describe the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, even though it is not strictly speaking correct for almost all of them, but other terms are also used. They include uprooting, forced relocation, and incarceration.

Timeline

SEPTEMBER 1939

The *War Measures Act* gives the federal government broad powers.

MARCH–AUGUST 1941

Japanese Canadians are required to register with the federal government.

DECEMBER 1941

Japan enters the war.

JANUARY 1942

The federal government orders the relocation of all adult Japanese-Canadian men from the Pacific Coast.

FEBRUARY 1942

The federal government authorizes the relocation of all people of Japanese ancestry from a 160-kilometre-wide zone along the Pacific Coast.

1943

The federal government authorizes the forced sale of property confiscated from Japanese Canadians.

1945

Japanese Canadians in British Columbia camps have two options: move eastwards to other areas of Canada, or be expelled to Japan, which the government calls “repatriation.”

MAY 1946

About 4,000 Japanese Canadians are deported to Japan.

1 APRIL 1949

Japanese Canadians are allowed to return to the Pacific Coast.

AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 1988

The Canadian government signs a compensation agreement with the Japanese-Canadian community (August) and formally apologizes (September).