

# Canada and humanitarianism during the 20th century history essay



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At present day, Canada is a country widely affiliated with peacekeeping, third world aid, and humanitarianism, to people internationally. Canada being one of the most culturally diverse nations, Canada has been known to accept many people regardless of controversial individual characteristics, such as gender, religious views, sexual orientation, or place of birth. Though, it is human nature internationally to distinguish and isolate fellow beings based on these criteria, yet to be humanitarian one must have an ideology of kindness, consideration and compassion towards all people, regardless of their status. However, during the past century, Canada had not stuck to its philanthropic nature as one would have believed. Primarily, the various discriminatory and restrictive laws which were instituted by the Canadian government. Secondly, Canadian treatment of certain groups of people was poor and unfair. Lastly, Canada had unethically weakened the rights of particular citizens. Although Canada may be considered a nation that does not discriminate any person, Canada went through a very rough and arguable past, during the last century, and humanitarianism is and has not been a part of Canada's national identity.

Firstly, humanitarianism is not part of Canada's national identity, since Canada had implemented many laws that were restrictive and discriminatory against people residing in Canada. Japanese Canadians first started immigrating to Canada, particularly British Columbia in large numbers during the late 1800's through to the early 1900's. Due to the majority of white skinned people living in Canada at the time, the Japanese community was unfortunately subject to indirect discrimination and harsh treatment due to descent. In B. C., many political leaders passed various laws including the

denial of voting rights aimed at the Japanese population, for the sole purpose of encouraging them to leave the country ("Japanese Canadians"). Among other things, Japanese immigrants were not able to work like other Canadian citizens, they were given poor wages and laws were passed to prevent them from working in professions they might have had in their country of origin ("Japanese Canadians"). Twelve weeks after the attacks on Pearl Harbour the Canadian government passed the War Measures Act which had allowed the Canadian government to legally remove Japanese people living in Canada within a 160km of the Pacific coast ("Japanese Canadians"). Japanese Canadians had to undergo many situations similar to these due to government policies, though most policies were solely created or instituted due to Japanese discrimination. On another note, there were also many laws and policies passed by the government to further discourage and prevent the immigration of Japanese or any other racial distinction other than the preferred, from entering Canada. An example of this was the Komagata Maru incident, where 376 Punjabis from Eastern India had boarded the Japanese-owned ship to sail to Canada in hopes of boarding and living in Canada ("Komagata Maru"). Due to the views of Canada on immigration, Canada had put into effect an order-in-council that required immigrants travelling by boat to travel in a non-stop continuous passage to Canada ("Komagata Maru"). This made it extremely difficult for immigrants to successfully enter Canada. Upon arrival, majority of the people on board were detained, they had then lost their case to get into Canada, and were planning on how to depart. They had departed back to Kolkata, India in a Canadian provided cruiser, upon arrival they were under suspicion by police which then resulted in 20 of the passengers being killed ("Komagata Maru"). This is a clear historical

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event that could have been prevented by the government of Canada, as there was no reasons for the harsh treatment of the innocent passengers of this particular ship upon arrival on Canada. Canada's ignorance for others particularly Asian immigrants further show why humanitarianism has not been part of Canada's national identity.

Secondly, humanitarianism has not always been a part of Canada's national identity due to the horrendous treatment of certain people leaving in Canada. For one, the horrible internment of Japanese citizens and people, after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour. Nearing the end of the 1800's and the early 1900's, a large wave of Japanese citizens started immigrating into Canada from Japan. At the time of the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour, in British Columbia there were approximately 22, 000 Japanese Canadians residing there, the majority were Canadian citizens (" Japanese Internment"). However, due to Japanese attacks on the American naval base and World War II, the Japanese were considered " enemy aliens" along with other citizens of varying descent. From this, the Japanese were subject to harsh and unfair treatment socially, through the implementation of various new laws pointed towards the Japanese population. Japanese citizens were forcefully taken from their homes and then placed into internment camps, where they were forced into harsh living conditions and also forced to do hard labour. Helpless civilians were forced to separate from their families and leave all their belongings behind, while putting their trust in the word of the government. The views of Canada, politically, can be reflected by Ian MacKenzie, a cabinet minister from B. C. at the time says: " It is the governments plan to get these people out of B. C. as fast as possible. It is my

personal intention, as long as I remain in public life, to see they never come back here. Let our slogan be for British Columbia: No Japs from the Rockies to the seas." (qtd. In " Japanese Internment"). The government of Canada had unfairly treated the Japanese citizens of Canada for actions not committed by them. On the other hand, a notable incident of non-humanitarian acts carried out by the government was what had happened at Africville, a small town of black Canadians located in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Approximately 400 people lived in Africville, these people were isolated from discrimination, racism, and they were able to live safely in privacy. The city considered this area as industrial space and planned for the construction of many undesirable buildings to be constructed around the surrounding area of Africville (Ward). Africville was left undisturbed until the City of Halifax started creating plans for the relocation the inhabitants and demolition of Africville. The city had established a group of " caretakers" to be the official voice of the inhabitants of Africville, these people had barely any knowledge of Africville, and so because of this, the city was ruled in favour for the terms of relocation (Ward). A resident's account of what the relocation was like is as follows: " Those who refused or were slow to leave often found themselves scrambling out of the back door with their belongings as the bulldozers were coming in the front." (qtd. In Ward). Unfortunately, the residents of Africville were only compensated less than \$500 for the mindless and non-emphatic actions of the government in the relocation of Africville.

Lastly, humanitarianism has not been a part of Canada's national identity, for the reason that Canada had weakened and/or removed some of the rights

of individuals living in Canada. First of all, the changes made by the Canadian government to the way how Japanese people live. Closely after the attacks on Pearl Harbour, tensions were high between the Japanese and the Canadian people. Because of this, Canadian railways fired all Japanese workers along with multiple other Canadian industries that also followed similarly. Also, due to the attacks, Japanese citizens were sent to internment camps for cheap forced labour. Moreover, Japanese people were told to bring a mere 68kg's of belongings each to bring with them to these camps ("Living..."). The Japanese had carried heavy losses throughout their internment; they had lost their property, personal belongings, and vehicles without consent and/or knowledge. Along with this, they had been stripped of many basic rights including: their right to vote, their right to keep a fishing license, right for free choice of work, and the right for equal pay ("Japanese Canadians"). Japanese Canadians were expected to live in extremely poor living conditions. Two families were put into small crude huts containing only one kitchen and two bedrooms, also until 1943, there was no electricity or water ("Living..."). Similar to the Japanese, black Canadians living in the small town of Africville were treated very poorly and had their civil liberties unrightfully taken away from them without reason. The city of Halifax planned for the redevelopment of Africville and relocation of citizens living in Africville, they were promised to be placed in improved living conditions, welfare planning, and re-housing of residents (Ward). The Halifax government said the relocation was part of a large urban renewal plan and it was for "humanitarian" reasons (Ward). The proposed plan of the government of Halifax was to be voted on by an "alliance" created by the city, the alliance consisted of 10 citizens who had barely any knowledge of

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Africville to represent Africville in city discussions (Ward). The government did this rather than allowing citizens who have lived in the town of Africville for centuries represent the town, instead the people living in Africville were not consulted with for any new agreements for the relocation terms proposed by the government; they did not have a say in what would become of Africville. When the time had come for the relocating of the inhabitants and demolition of the town, people's personal belongings were transported in garbage trucks and citizens were shipped to slum housings (Ward). The town was ultimately levelled by demolition crews and people were moved to public housing. In this case, the government had taken away the black skinned citizens right to own property, since they had destroyed their land, and also they had lost their right to appeal publically for rightful compensation of their belongings and properties. Unfortunately, the innocent people who had lived in Africville were barely compensated for the pointless and irreversible damage caused by Canada.

In conclusion, through the countless historical events showing how Canada has acted in many situations throughout the 1900's, the truth of Canada's real nature is revealed. Firstly, due to the unspeakably harsh treatment of the thousands in the Japanese internment, through the prejudice of the Canadian government and people. Secondly, the unfair and unruly actions of the Canadian government and people towards citizens of a dark skin complexion, particularly what had occurred in Africville. Lastly, the poor handling of the Komagata Maru incident and the prejudicial implementation of the multiple restrictive laws of immigration. Although, at present day, Canada is helping people from all places without discrimination, and it is

considered to be one of the most respectful and humanitarian country internationally. Though, the forgotten past by many of Canada's past actions should not be overlooked. Considering the past, Canada should not allow it to go unnoticed, the wrongdoings of Canada are too great to be ignored. By carefully analyzing the troubling and disturbing past of Canada, it is historically clear that humanitarianism has not always been part of the Canadian ideology.