

Citizenship - is it valued or only a formal term?

The recent claims of Japanese Canadians that they be compensated for crimes committed against them by the Canadian government during the Second World War seems fairly simple. They were discriminated against and they want justice. In 1942, Japanese Canadians were taken from their homes without just cause and compelled for years to live in labour camps under degrading circumstances. Their jobs, homes and possessions were confiscated and they were never adequately compensated.

The true reality of this situation was Ottawa's racial interpretation of citizenship. Hidden in the hideous paranoia of McCarthyism, the expulsion from British Columbia of Japanese Canadians was a definite black mark on Canadian history.

We know now that there was never a real threat to national security, nor a reason of practical proportions to perceive such a threat. By our actions we said that race was more important than citizenship. Unfortunately, many Japanese Canadians accepted what was done to them with quiet resignation, picking up the pieces and rebuilding their lives as Canadians.

Ken Adachi's definitive, *The enemy that never was: A history of the Japanese Canadians*, (1976); quotes a man who was fired from his job after the evacuation because his employer discovered he was Japanese; the man recalled later, "I said 'to hell with it' and started my own business, 'I out-whited the whites' and five years later I was so successful they asked me to come back." Such approach is typical of his people, for various reasons — a tradition that merits discipline, a powerful sense of family ambition, and a devotion to Canada that persisted in the face of appalling discrimination — they chose to express their defiance of the authorities by making themselves useful, successful, and respected citizens.

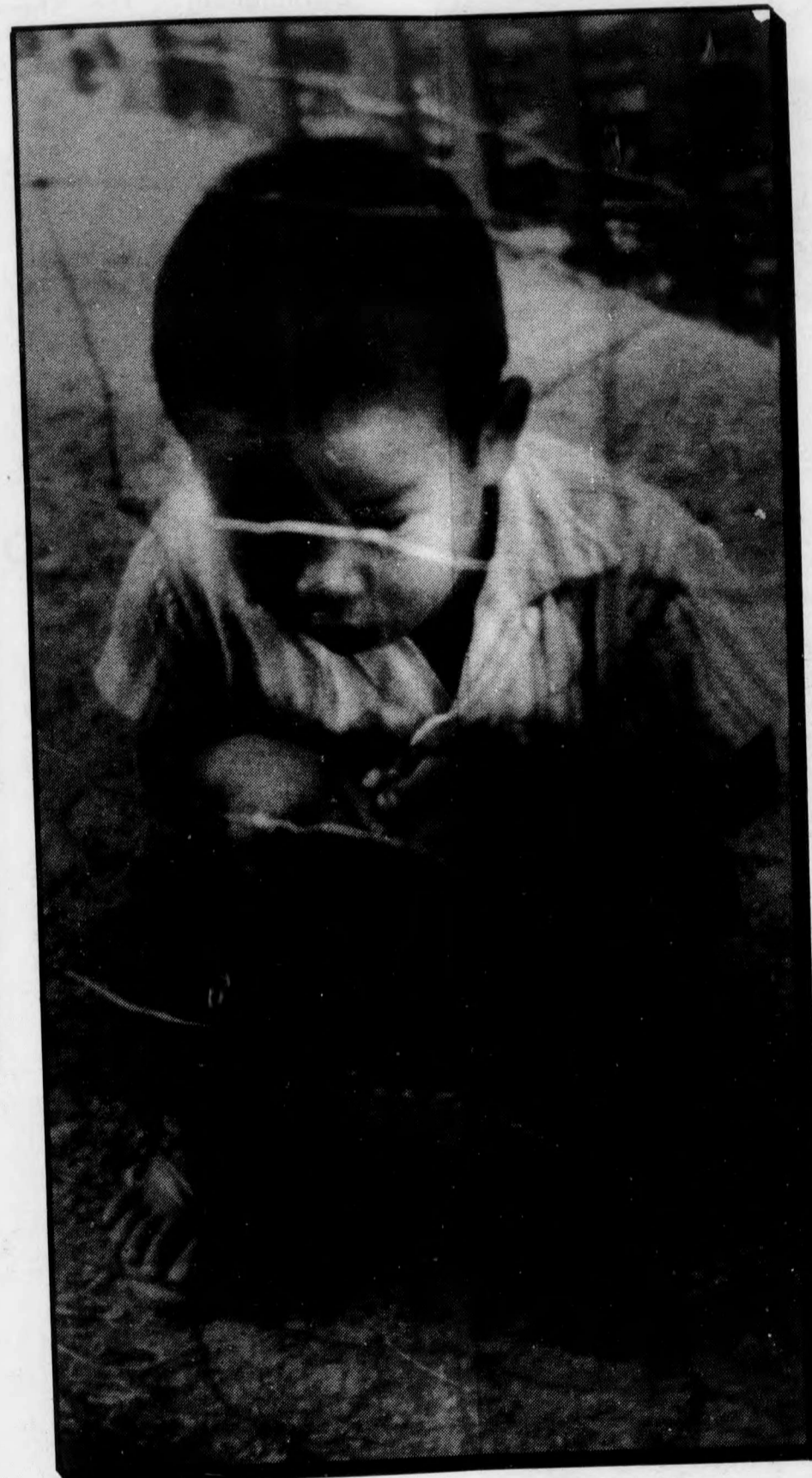
Until now no sincere effort has been made by our government to give reparations to survivors of the internment camps. Presently, groups of Japanese Canadians are lobbying in Ottawa, in search of a financial settlement that will supply token restitution. Although compensation of the material kind (money) is desirable the underlying evil cannot be written off, this instance still remains as a constant reminder of our country's often racist policy toward visible minorities.

The present battle between Native peoples and our federal government shows similar strains that surround our racist history. Japanese Canadians chose to fight as individuals and worked hard toward assimilating into Canadian society. Many Japanese Canadians would probably

This week's feature deals with an issue of paramount importance; excerpts have been taken from *Saturday Night Magazine* and a recent edition of "The Fifth Estate" on C.B.C.. It is my hope that such a feature will be thought provoking and provide valuable insight to the reader.

The views expressed are my own and not necessarily those of the Brunswickan staff.

R. Hutchins
Features Editor



I shall pass through this world but once. Any good there of that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it for I shall pass this way again.

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This is an excerpt of a direct quote from the *Saturday Night Magazine*, July 1984.

The Japanese Canadians were turned into aliens in their own country. The government, with a few brusque orders under the War Measures Act, radically altered the concept of citizenship. People born here, and others who had acquired citizenship, were told that for reasons of race alone they could not be trusted.

Before the Second World War, Japanese Canadians in B.C. were already being treated badly. They could not vote or hold public office and they were barred from certain professions, including the law. But until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, no one had thought to tell them what they could own or where they could live. As soon as Canada and Japan were at war, however, the Japanese Canadians were treated as pariahs. Nine days after Pearl Harbour they were forced to register with the government. Their property was confiscated, and they were ordered to leave the coastal areas of B.C. A federal government order of February 26, 1942, declared, among other things, that "No person of the Japanese race shall have in his possession or use...any motor vehicle, camera, radio transmitter, radio receiving set, firearm, ammunition or explosive."

Inland work camps were set up, thousands of men were shipped to them, and families were arbitrarily separated. A typical victim, a Canadian-born nineteen-year-old in Vancouver at the time, recalled recently how it worked. "My father, the breadwinner, was removed first in February, to a camp near Jasper. I, the eldest son, was moved in April. My next brother, who turned eighteen that month, had to leave shortly after. This left behind my mother and her other six children, all under eighteen, in Vancouver. They were finally moved to the newly created camp of Tashme, just outside Hope, B.C., in September, 1942. And there are still people who wonder what this fuss is all about."

By October, 1942, 21,000 had been evacuated from the coastal region; of these more than sixty per cent were Canadian-born, and fourteen per cent were naturalized citizens.

Nothing positive can be said about the government's actions during wartime, but the treatment of the Japanese Canadians after the war seems even more disgraceful. With Japan's empire humiliated and its cities in ashes, Canada continued to treat Japanese Canadians with suspicion and contempt. After 1945 the government's policy was to encourage the Japanese to emigrate to Japan, and some had been so frightened that they did so. The remainder, the govern-

ment decided, had to be dispersed across Canada, so that they could not gather again in B.C. and annoy the white majority. Above all, they had to be controlled. The federal minister of labour was given power to direct their employment, travel, and residence; where they were forbidden to have licences for commercial fishing, the means by which many had lived. In October, 1945, two months after the war ended, a man was arrested by the RCMP and sentenced to a year in Oakalla prison for travelling in B.C. without a permit. Three years later another man was sentenced to a year's hard labour for the same crime. The war ended for most Canadians in the summer of 1945, but for Japanese Canadians it went on for much longer. The anti-Japanese regulations were not lifted until March 31, 1949.

On January 24, 1983, Mark MacGuigan, the minister of justice, described these events as a "very unfortunate experience."

choose to forget the atrocities committed against them and live as Canadians, proud citizens and nation builders. The unfortunate truth is that assimilation as a goal cannot be attained in a racist society. The discrimination suffered by visible minorities cannot be pronounced or legislated to an end; it is something that individual Canadians need to come to grips with while beginning to value "citizenry" for its true meaning. We must realize that citizenry is more than a formal right to exist in Canada's white majority.

The treatment of Japanese Canadians can be transported into a modern cultural prison evident at UNB as it was in 1942. Although we haven't built camps to intern visible minorities, the reality exists that many are not included in our day to day lives. Our citizenship has been given more than earned and thus we should have pride in persons who choose our country as their future, willing to take on the values of our society and work to be proud Canadians. If one considers the lack of effort on the part of individual Canadians to view citizenship with equality then the Japanese Internment can be viewed as a modern phenomenon as well as a past experience.

The effort and expense on the part of Canadians to rectify past misdealings with Japanese Canadians, natives and other minorities are justified. Such efforts should not only be made to heal the wounds inflicted upon such peoples but also assert the principle, firmly and irrevocably, that no ethnic characteristic can in any way modify the rights and freedoms of Canadian citizenship. It is obvious that only when we defy racism can we begin to truly value citizenship and democracy.

So, as I've pointed out the fight for restitution is also a defiance toward the past humiliations and present degradations. A government that has not addressed assimilation as a delicate concept but surged ahead with little or no respect for cultural equality is the real enemy. Money is only a teasing weapon in Ottawa's arsenal. We have been giving money to native peoples for 100 years to be used as a catalyst for assimilation yet in reality we never accepted them as equal or "Canadian". Thus assimilation cannot succeed.

Apologizing to Japanese Canadians by repaying a debt with dollars (\$) is a token gesture by our society, one many Canadians probably feel will erase the gross racism that occurred. I believe (as pointed out), that the problem is deeper and central to our future as a nation of minority interests.

I think that we as students must be sympathetic to such prevailing issues and begin to act and think critically of the values our society has destroyed by mis-treating other "true" Canadians.