

Resource #2

Name: _____

Sikh-Canadians and the Building of a Nation



Sikh labourers board a train in Vancouver, c.1900-10 (courtesy Sikhmuseum.com)

The arrival of Sikhs onto Canadian Soil

As you have learned, the Aboriginals were the very first people that lived in Canada, before the European settlers arrived. Individuals of Asian and Black descent were also being brought over by the Canadian government to work in temporary, and often dangerous jobs. Sikh-Canadians first made their presence in Canada, on their way to London,

England, when the Queen invited Sikh soldiers to the Diamond Jubilee Awards. It was not until 1903 that the first Sikh immigrants arrived onto Canadian soil and settled in Ontario and British Columbia. The Canadian government did not want immigration from the continent of Asia, and discriminated against many individuals. The government intentionally established racist policies to ensure individuals from India, China, Japan and other parts of Asia were not allowed into the country. By 1906, there were 2 124 Sikh immigrants in Canada, while only 9 Sikh women were present between 1904 - 1920 (Canadian Sikh Centre, 2011).

Sikh men had to leave their families behind, in India as they were not allowed to bring them to Canada.

The experiences of Sikh-Canadians

The Canadian government in the 1800s and 1900s was not very welcoming towards people of colour. Instead of promoting inclusionary policies, the government saw racialized people as a 'threat' - Sikhs in particular, were seen as a part of the "Hindoo Invasion" (Canadian Sikh Centre, 2011). They faced challenging times and segregation. Sikh men that first came worked at low paying and often times, dangerous jobs - they received less pay than White individuals. Sikhs primarily worked in the forestry, mining, and fishing industry in Ontario and British Columbia.

As mentioned before, the Canadian government created different policies in place to exclude people of colour, particularly from Asia, from entering the country. Some of the policies were:

- The Continuous Journey Act: created in 1908 by the Canadian government to ensure that individuals from Asiatic countries (i.e. India, China) were not allowed to enter Canada, unless they travelled to Canada continuously, without any stops from the country of origin.
- \$200 Immigrant Policy to prohibit Asians from entering: created in 1908 to ensure that individuals coming to Canada have \$200 or more with them. This was a very big challenge considering many people did not have that type of money.

In addition to this exclusionary practises, Sikhs had to face a number of anti-Asian riots.

How did Sikhs deal with the hostile Canadian environment?

Since Sikh immigrants were not allowed to bring over their families, they had to face very lonely times. The Sikh community established their own place of worship where members congregated, prayed and socialized. It not only helped them cope, but it further strengthened their faith and identity.

Questions

Please, read each question carefully and answer it in a complete sentence. Remember to use details from the text to support your answer.

1. When did the first Sikhs arrive in Canada?

2. Were there many Sikh women immigrating to Canada? Why, or why not?

3. Describe two policies created by the Canadian government to exclude people immigrating to Canada from Asiatic countries.

4. How did Sikhs cope with the exclusionary environment in Canada?

5. Do you think it was fair for the Canadian government to not allow people from India and other Asiatic countries? Write a persuasive paragraph using details from the text.

Resource #3

Pardeep Nagra: the boxer who stood his ground

In 1999, The Canadian Amateur Boxing Association (CABA) banned Pardeep Nagra (a prominent Sikh-Canadian from Toronto), from competing in a boxing match because of his beard. Having uncut hair is important for many Sikhs and rather than providing religious accommodations, the CABA refused. Pardeep challenged this and as a result, the Ontario Superior Court allowed him the right to fight with his beard intact. Research the association between the Canadian Charter of Rights and the decision by the Ontario Superior Court that allowed Pardeep the right to box with his beard.



