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Mary Kitagawa: a degree of justice

by [John Endo Greenaway](#) · November 30, 2011

On November 16, 2011, following their scheduled meeting, the Senate Tributes Committee of the University of British Columbia presented a press release stating that the University would award special Honourary Degrees to all Japanese Canadians students who were enrolled in 1942 and forced to leave the coast and give up their post secondary education following the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Air Force. For Mary Kitagawa, who has led the fight to have the former students formally recognized, the news was both welcome and a long time coming.

Having come up against a brick wall of indifference in the early days of her three-year campaign, it was surely vindicating to hear the news that powers-that-be had acknowledged the justness of her cause.

Given that the majority of the former students have since passed on, the victory was tinged with some sadness, given that they would not be able to enjoy the trip to the podium to receive their diplomas. Still, for their families, who will receive the diplomas in their names, it will carry a special meaning that will hopefully not be diminished by the passage of time.

The Bulletin spoke to Mary Kitagawa several weeks after the news was announced.

In Her Own Words: Mary Kitagawa

by John Endo Greenaway



This has been a long and I'm sure arduous battle for you Mary – what got your started on this quest to have UBC officially recognize the students who were forced to leave at the outbreak of the war in the Pacific?

I was surfing the net one day and saw an article that caught my eye. The article was about Japanese American students who were expelled from their campuses in 1942. It stated that the University of Washington had presented Honourary Degrees to all of their former students in person or posthumously. Later, I learned that all the American universities along the Pacific coast were doing the same thing. I began to research the situation at UBC but found no information. The first letter of inquiry I wrote to Dr. Stephen Toope, President and Vice Chancellor of UBC is dated May 22, 2008. That letter was forwarded to Dr. Sally Thorne, Chair of the Senate Tributes Committee. Thus began my crusade to convince the Committee of the importance of righting a wrong. Dr. Thorne insisted that UBC did not “expel” the students. She said that faculty and staff of Japanese heritage left for many reasons including forced relocation. This is when I realized that Dr. Thorne did not know our history. “No Asians were allowed into the professions in BC until 1949” therefore they could not have been on staff or faculty. In order to practice in the profession, you had to be on the voter’s list and the amendment to the British Columbia Elections Act of 1895 denied them the vote.

Dr. Thorne went on to say that UBC’s role within this issue is not directly comparable to the universities south of the boarder. She did admit that UBC should identify an appropriate tribute so that the lessons concerning the internment would not be forgotten. However, she said that granting honourary degrees to this small subset of people would not occur. Her reluctance to admit that UBC was culpable in ridding the campus of Canadians of Japanese heritage was the sticking point in our communication. I do not think that she was aware that 49 Japanese Canadian male students in the UBC Canadian Officers Training Corp were summarily dismissed one day after Pearl Harbor was bombed. The

Military Committee of UBC that expelled them included the President L.S. Klink, Chancellor R.E. McKechnie, Dean J.N. Finlayson, Mr. B. Wood, Mr. Edward McBride, and Lt. Col. Gordon Shrum.

The students were told that UBC did not want any Japs on campus. The Dean of Women called a meeting of Nisei women to explain to them that the university would not assist them to remain in Vancouver and to continue their education. Only two members of the faculty spoke out for their Japanese Canadian students. They were Henry Angus and E.H. Morrow who helped his "boys" write exams and re-establish them in eastern Canada.

In the US, sympathetic administrators and faculty members protested loudly the inclusion of their students in President Roosevelt's Executive Order 6099 that sent 120,000 Japanese Americans to concentration camps. Faculty members were sent to the camps to help their students write their final exams and helped many to register at universities outside of the exclusion zone. The Japanese Canadian students at UBC felt abandoned and powerless to defend themselves. They left the campus questioning the injustice of their dismissal and the abandonment by the university that they loved. None were ever able to set foot again on the hallowed grounds of UBC.

So you initially met with resistance . . . when did that begin to change?

For about two years after I began my crusade, it was a lonely exercise. The UBC Senate Committee seemed determined to deny my request. There were long periods when I would not receive a reply. However, I kept sending them information about our history and to make them aware of the information about the American universities' decision to grant honorary degrees. At one time I was told that the issue that we were discussing was to remain confidential. Their need for secrecy made me more determined to broadcast the information to others. On November 17, 2010, Shag Ando, David Iwaasa, Bryan Tsuyuki Tomlinson, and my husband Tosh joined me to form a committee to discuss how best to tackle this issue. Bryan was very helpful because he was on the UBC Senate as a student rep for his faculty and knew the inner workings of the Committee. By the time he joined our group, his time on the Senate had expired. I was very grateful for the suggestions given to me that were so influential on how we would progress on this issue.

What happened next?

The first and important issue was finding the former students. Shag Ando was able to find a list with names, faculty, home town, and the year that the students were in. This list was crucial in our effort to begin contacting the students or their relatives. I began by writing an article in the Nikkei Voice, April 2011 to alert our community about our quest. Information about some students began to trickle in.

However, I felt that if the wider community knew about our story, then perhaps more people could be found. I contacted Patricia Graham, Editor-in-Chief of the Vancouver Sun whom I had met at a National Retreat for Women Conference in April of 2010 where I was one of the speakers. Patricia agreed to publish our story and had reporter Gerry Bellett write an article in the August 27, 2011 Vancouver Sun. That one article spawned many requests for interviews from other newspapers and radio stations. The power of the media was on our side; our story was now nationwide. Mits Sumiya has become an articulate spokes person for his classmates of 1942. UBC's student newspaper the Ubysey wrote in favor of our quest in four issues. The November 21, 2011 issue has Mit's photo covering most of the front page accompanying the article about our victory. Their editorial was damning of the university's reluctance to grant honorary degrees to the 1941 Japanese Canadian students. The students at UBC are now alerted about the issue.

How did you first hear that UBC had agreed to grant honorary degrees? What was your feeling upon hearing the news?

I learned of the media release through an email that came from the President's Office after their meeting. The relief I felt was immeasurable. My joy was evident on the CKNW radio interview the next day.

What now?

The focus now is to locate all of the students or their heirs before the spring convocation of 2012. We are hoping that through publicity generated by the media release, we will be getting additional leads to locate them. Mika Fukuma from the Nikkei Voice has been a great help in locating students, relatives of students and in publishing names of those who are not yet found.

Most of the remaining former students are now in their late 80s and 90s. I have talked to fifteen of them on the phone. It is so rewarding to hear their voices reflecting on the joy they felt in learning that they are now going to be granted Honorary degrees from UBC in May of 2012. Dr. Nori Nishio told me from Nanaimo that he did not phone me on the day he read the media release because he wanted to make sure that the information was real. He said, "I did not think that it would happen in my life time."

Have you met with UBC since the decision was released?

Tosh and I went to meet with Christopher Eaton, UBC's Associate Registrar & Director Senate & Curriculum Services on November 22, 2011. He gave us hope that all of what we asked for will be given: cap and gown, Honorary Bachelor's degrees, bound diplomas with an appropriate Latin phrase, reception and others which he could not define at that time. The Senate Committee will be meeting in January 2012 to discuss the plans.

I must thank all the people who came on board to lobby and flood the President's and the Senate Tributes Committee's offices with letters of support. Dr. Kerry Jang, UBC professor and Vancouver city councilor began by lobbying the President. His help was timely and immeasurable. Other faculty members who were instrumental in this outcome were Dr. Henry Yu, Dr. William McMichael, and University of Victoria professor Dr. John Price. I am sure there were many others behind the scene at the university who helped. To them I owe a debt of gratitude. I must also thank Professor Emeritus Stuart Philpott of the University of Toronto, Department of Anthropology and Ken Noma of the NAJC for writing letters of support. Roy Miki and my sister, Rose Murakami have contributed so much in guiding me through the maze of definitions and ideas. Thank you also to the petition gathers and signers. I will use it as a backup when appropriate. The support of my colleagues on the GVJCCA Human Rights Committee was invaluable. They are Augustina Asantos, Judy Hanazawa, Tatsuo Kage, Lily Shinde, Lorene Oikawa, Morgan Elander and my husband, Tosh Kitagawa.

It all seemed to happen so quickly—from notices in the Nikkei press looking for former students and radio interviews in the mainstream media, to UBC agreeing to grant the degrees.

The three year journey to find justice for these worthy and forgotten students has been a trying but rewarding experience. I was determined to find justice for their sufferings however long it took to do it. Although UBC needed a lot of prodding, they made the right decision. To refuse our quest would have reflected negatively on what they claim to stand for: justice and human rights. In May of 2012, let us all celebrate with the students by attending the convocation on campus to help validate their victory. They have patiently waited for seventy years to join the alumni that once betrayed them. Let us dedicate the coming commencement day as a "Day of Remembrance" for those students who have left us without having the opportunity to celebrate with their 1942 UBC colleagues.

We are asking those former UBC students or relatives of those who have passed away to contact us by email at heiwa@telus.net or by phone at 604-943-3195. Give us your names and contact numbers so that we could phone you to get your history. You deserve to be honoured, however late. We will continue our effort on your behalf to see that you receive your special honorary degree, resplendent in your cap and gown.

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Migration
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Seventy-Five Years is Long Enough

Will the BC Government Finally Acknowledge and Address Its Role in the Uprooting of Japanese Canadians?

MMP Working Paper #2016-11-15

In 1988, the Canadian government formally acknowledged that its wartime measures to uproot, incarcerate, dispossess, and exile Japanese Canadians from the coast of British Columbia were unjustified. Research compiled in this study, however, suggests that the main instigators in the uprooting were politicians at the provincial and local levels and that the provincial government was complicit both directly and indirectly in the injustices perpetrated against Japanese Canadians. In light of this new evidence, a 2012 'apology' passed by the provincial government appears to be a classic case of reparation displacement. After 175 years of colonialism, is it not time for the provincial government to come clean regarding its role in perpetuating the dispossession of First Nations, exclusion of Asian Canadians, and the uprooting of Japanese Canadians?

Authors: John Price

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**University
of Victoria**

Centre for
Asia-Pacific Initiatives

It has been 175 years since colonialism arrived on the shores of Vancouver Island, 150 years since confederation, and 75 years since the uprooting of Japanese Canadians. First Nations and Asian Canadian communities affected by the long history of dispossession and exclusion in this province have proven their resilience in the face of incredible challenges. First Nations continue to struggle for their land and other rights. Though much has changed for Asian Canadians, the legacy of a century of discrimination lives on. The imperative of change in 2017 is writ large.

It is indeed time for the many generations of non-Indigenous settler communities to be given access to the past and to fully embrace decolonization. As Bev Sellars points out in her recent work: "I know you are not personally responsible for these laws and policies, but now that you are aware, you have a responsibility to help change the situation. You cannot turn a blind eye to this because, if you do, you will be doing the same thing as your ancestors. That would be my message to all Canadians."¹

For this province to transcend its colonial roots, if justice and reconciliation are to actually take place, the provincial government must set an example by fully acknowledging and addressing its own role in the long history of white supremacy that reigned in Pacific Canada.

In this particular report, I address the specific question of provincial responsibility for the uprooting of Japanese Canadians (1941-1949)². My concern with this topic arose from research I did about local responsibility for the uprooting five years ago, using the city of Victoria as a case study. The results of that research suggested that local politicians with a supportive press were critical in waging a concerted campaign that culminated in the federal government passing Order-in-Council 1486 on February 24, 1942, authorizing what in effect became an attempt at clearing the coast, and indeed the province,

of Japanese Canadians. The study also revealed the complicity of the B.C. government at multiple levels. To date, the provincial government has yet to acknowledge or address its direct involvement in the uprooting, dispossession and exile of Japanese Canadians³ even though the federal government reached a settlement with the Japanese Canadians community in 1988, nearly thirty years ago.⁴

In this article I draw upon the research relating to Victoria as described above and also the work of others, particularly that of Roy Miki, Ken Adachi and Ann Sunahara, whose writings have inspired me for many years.⁵ The paper first addresses recent developments relating to provincial redress issues to illustrate how the provincial government has failed to adequately acknowledge or address its responsibility for the uprooting. I then document how it was both indirectly and directly implicated in the events that transpired 75 years ago. There remain many gaps in the research and documenting the full story of what transpired at the provincial level requires a dedicated research project, possibly as part of a provincial acknowledgment of its responsibility.

The Current State of Affairs

In 1988, Japanese Canadians gained a landmark settlement from the federal government in acknowledgment of its role in the uprooting. In 2012, the provincial government passed a 'motion without notice' introduced by Liberal MLA Naomi Yamamoto:

*Be it resolved that this House apologizes for the events during the Second World War, when under the authority of the federal War Measures Act, 21,000 Japanese Canadians were incarcerated in internment camps in the interior of British Columbia and had their property seized. The House deeply regrets that these Canadians were discriminated against simply because they were of Japanese descent and believes that all Canadians regardless of their origins should be welcomed and respected.*⁶

As is clear in the resolution, no responsibility at all is assigned to the B.C. government for what happened, a clear example of what some have referred to

as reparation displacement.⁷ Furthermore, the ‘apology’ is designed to distance the legislators today, portrayed as enlightened egalitarians, from what happened in the past and it portrays the Japanese Canadian community as victims of an uncaring federal government alone. A number of individuals and organizations from Japanese Canadian communities subsequently criticized the resolution for a lack of prior consultation and for not providing any measures to address this historical wrong.

The inadequacy of this apology becomes painfully clear in light of the 2014 provincial government inquiry into its own role in promoting racism and discrimination against Chinese Canadians and its subsequent apology. In that case the government began a process of consultation with Chinese Canadian communities, convening seven public meetings and receiving over 40 written submissions over the course of 2013-14. Working with legislative staff and the legislative library, the government began a serious attempt to compile the history of its role in perpetrating racism and legislative measures related to Chinese Canadians. This culminated in the publication of *The Chinese Historical Wrongs Consultation Final Report and Recommendations* (see Appendix), the adoption of an official apology, and the beginning of remedial actions through a series of Legacy Initiatives.⁸

A number of individuals and groups in Chinese communities criticized this agreement for its lack of compensation to individual head tax payers and the small amount allocated for legacy initiatives. For example, Professor Henry Yu, called at the time for the establishment of a \$15 million endowment fund but the provincial government only provided a one-time only \$1 million fund for Legacy Initiatives.⁹ I respect those points of view and I cite the agreement not to promote it but because it underscores the discrepancy with the government’s treatment of the Japanese Canadian community, among others.¹⁰ This type of differential treatment can be extremely divisive.

Our Mississippi?

Some people don’t realize to what extent the provincial government promoted and institutionalized racism in British Columbia.

Since its inception as a colonial settler state, the governing bodies of this province developed unique and distinct policies--refusing to sign treaties while dispossessing First Nations, advocating and legislating Asian exclusion, disenfranchising First Nations and Asian Canadians, and uprooting Japanese Canadians in 1942.

This was a province like no other. It embodied the politics of white supremacy, shaping Canadian federal policies to an extent that has seldom been fully understood.

The historical example most pertinent to this essay is the role the provincial government played in denying the right to vote to Japanese Canadians, those born in Canada or those who had naturalized. This they did by legislative fiat in 1895, adding Japanese to the already excluded Chinese and First Nations. Let me be clear about the significance of this—even in the U.S. South, segregated states such as Mississippi were unable to do what the B.C. government did—changes brought about during the civil war meant that states could not take away the right to vote of African Americans because that right was protected under the U.S. constitution. Thus Mississippi had to find indirect means (literacy tests, etc) to stop African Americans from voting. Politicians in B.C., however, faced no such restrictions and they moved with alacrity to take away the right to vote from Asian Canadians and Indigenous peoples in 1872. However, as resistance to such racist measures increased, the B.C. government also resorted to subterfuge and used indirect means, such as language tests for new immigrants, to screen out those of Asian heritage, just as they did in Mississippi.

However, in 1900, Tomekichi Homma, with the support of a mobilized Japanese Canadian community,

challenged the ban and won at the County Court. A determined B.C. government, however, proceeded to appeal that decision to the Supreme Court of British Columbia. After losing there, the B.C. government took the extraordinary measure of taking the case all the way to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London. The provincial attorney-general of the day, D.M. Eberts, argued: "Even if they exercised the franchise properly, it is intolerable that these foreign races, which can never be assimilated with our population, should in many constituencies determine who shall represent the people in the legislature."¹¹ The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council overturned the ruling of the B.C. Supreme Court and thus Asian Canadians and First Nations were denied the right to vote for another 50 years. The significance of this is twofold. The aggressive actions taken to stop Japanese Canadians from voting derived solely from the B.C. government. For its own reasons, the federal government declined to be part of the province's lawsuits. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the uprooting could or would have taken place if Japanese Canadians had the franchise. Its denial had rendered them citizens without rights.

The denial of the franchise was only one of a slough of measures the B.C. government introduced against Japanese Canadians, not dissimilar to, and often in tandem with the measures taken against Chinese Canadians in the prewar period.¹² To date the provincial government has failed to examine or disclose its record regarding its discriminatory treatment of Japanese Canadians, not to mention its record towards First Nations. The search and verification of this unseemly history should surely be included in any substantive acknowledgment by the B.C. government, as it was in the case of the Chinese Canadian apology. For it was this institutionalized pressure that created the conditions in the province that fostered popular racism and set the scene for the uprooting of 1942.

Wartime Measures

Canada went to war in Europe in 1939 and Japan's imperial forces attacked the U.S., Hong Kong, and

Southeast Asia in December 1941. The war in the Pacific provoked concern that the conflict might come to the coast, and war fears spread, providing fertile terrain for a resurgence of racism in the province. However, the nature, extent, and duration of the measures taken against Japanese Canadians cannot be explained by war fears. The actions taken far exceeded any measures taken against those of German or Italian heritage in Canada. Furthermore, they also exceeded by a substantial margin the discriminatory measures the U.S. government imposed on Japanese Americans. Something else was going on.

What occurred was a concerted campaign led by ideologues and provincial politicians to achieve what some had long aimed for—the forced removal of Japanese Canadians from the province—what the UN today describes as ethnic cleansing.¹³ However, this was not easily accomplished. Much had changed in the decades prior to the war in the Pacific. A whole new generation of young nisei activists had come together to form the Japanese Canadian Citizens League. They began publishing an English-language weekly, *The New Canadian*. Japanese Canadians had won numerous allies including such people as Angus MacInnis, Hugh Keenleyside, and Nellie McClung who would not be easily stampeded into a racist pogrom against a community that they and many others had come to admire. Community resistance and the support of allies meant that racists who hoped to take advantage of war fears to expel Japanese Canadians had to mount a public campaign to achieve their goals. Implicated were municipal politicians, media, but setting the pace were provincial politicians, officials, and agencies. For example:

- In 1940, the provincial Department of Trade and Industry had been 'quietly studying the extent and character of oriental penetration in the economy of this province'.¹⁴ Department officials forwarded a list of all Japanese Canadians who held trade licenses as well as a list of JC incorporated companies to the BC Attorney General's office who replied it would of no doubt be 'of considerable use' to the department. This culture of surveillance arose from the perception that those of Japanese



- heritage could not be Canadian and thus were likely to be acting as agents of Japanese imperialism.
- In December 1941, the provincial minister of education, H.G. Perry, ordered an investigation into Japanese Canadian students enrolled in BC public schools, targeting them as possible problem students.¹⁵ The results of this investigation have yet to be made public. No such investigation was ever conducted against the children of German or Italian Canadians.
 - In meetings in Ottawa in January 8-9, 1942, BC Minister of Labour George Pearson and former Conservative MLA MacGregor MacIntosh, part of the B.C. coalition government at the time, lobbied the federal government heavily to uproot Japanese Canadians. They ran up against opposition from federal officials such as Henry Angus and Hugh Keenleyside, who did not believe Japanese Canadians posed a threat to national security. This encounter made Pearson, MacIntosh and other provincial politicians aware that their racist agenda would not be easily achieved and marked the beginning of a concerted campaign to uproot all Japanese Canadians.¹⁶
 - On January 23, George Pearson told the legislature that while in Ottawa for the 8-9 January meetings he had submitted “detailed proposals made by the Province.” To date these detailed proposals have not been available.
 - On January 30, Attorney-General R.L. Maitland stated in the legislature that the provincial government had ‘made representations’ regarding the Japanese in the province, and that he ‘did not feel safe with the Japanese on the coast’ and they could represent ‘a very real danger on this coast.’¹⁷
 - In Parliament on February 9, 1942, Robert Mayhew, Victoria MP called for the uprooting of all Japanese Canadians, leading the British Daily Colonist to proclaim “British Columbia is Demanding ‘All Out’ Removal of Japanese”. This marked an escalation in the campaign initiated by B.C. government representatives in January. A few days later, Victoria City Council unanimously passed a resolution demanding uprooting, a motion they sent to Premier Hart.¹⁸
 - On February 16, BC Premier Hart pressed for uprooting in discussions with federal cabinet minister Ian Mackenzie. The premier subsequently replied to Victoria City Council, declaring “every effort has been made by the Provincial Government to have Japanese aliens removed from vulnerable zone. On Saturday, last, two of our officials were sent to Ottawa to co-operate with the Dominion authorities in connection therewith, and you can be assured that pressure will be brought to bear to secure speedy action.”¹⁹ The two provincial officials sent to Ottawa were Arthur Dixon, Deputy Minister of Public Works and RW. Griffith, Unemployment Relief Administrator, presumably sent to work out the logistics of uprooting Japanese Canadians. Their roles and specific actions have yet to be documented.
 - On 17 February, BC Provincial Police commissioner T.W.S. Parsons, an appointee of the provincial government, wrote to BC Attorney General R.L. Maitland seeking the uprooting of all Japanese Canadians. Maitland forwarded this message to Ian Mackenzie in Ottawa. The B.C. Provincial Police force was a provincial body created by the province and responsible to it.²⁰
 - On 20 February, the BC Cabinet approved an order signed by the Minister of Education, H.G. Perry, ordering any ‘student of Japanese origin’ be stopped from wearing the uniform of a ‘school Cadet Corps’. This provincial order was a further measure that damned the position of Japanese Canadians, particularly nisei, many of whom were working hard to support the Canadian war effort.²¹ No such measures were taken against those of German or Italian heritage.
 - On 23 February, CCF leader Harold Winch went to Victoria to meet BC Liberal Premier Hart and the two men agreed to demand the uprooting of all people of Japanese heritage. They then together phoned Liberal cabinet minister Ian Mackenzie in

Ottawa to inform him of their joint position. The next day, the federal cabinet passed PC 1486, the order-in-council that allowed the indiscriminate removal of over 20,000 people of Japanese heritage from the coast, regardless of their citizenship or place of birth.²²

- In March 1942, the provincial government authorized the appointment of John Shirras, of the BC Provincial Police, to the post of assistant commissioner of the BC Security Commission, the body that oversaw the uprooting of Japanese Canadians in 1942-43.²³
- In March 1942, twenty BC citizens joined the BC Security Commission Advisory Board. Heading the list were R.L. Maitland, George Pearson and Harold Winch, all MLAs at the time. Maitland was the provincial Attorney-General and George Pearson was the Minister of Labour, both playing important roles in the campaign for uprooting. Winch was with the CCF.²⁴
- In August 1942, BC'S Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, E.H. Bridgman, collaborated with the federal Custodian's office (Custodian of Enemy Property) to pressure municipalities to provide property assessments records of Japanese Canadians, actively involving the provincial government in the process of dispossession.²⁵
- The following month, the BC government refused to provide any funding for education of the school-aged children in the camps in B.C. despite the fact that education was a provincial responsibility under the B.N.A. act. In other words, not only had the provincial government pushed for the uprooting, they attempted to deny young children they had uprooted from the coast and who were detained in interior camps the basic right to an education.²⁶

Postwar Measures

- In April 1947, the provincial government refused to grant the right to vote to Japanese Canadians or First Nations even though South Asians and Chinese Canadians won the right at that time.

Members of the CCF in the legislative committee reviewing the question voted to grant the right but the Liberal and Conservative members outnumbered them.²⁷

- In January 1948, the provincial premier, Liberal Byron Johnson advised Mackenzie King to extend the Orders-in-Council preventing Japanese Canadians from returning to the coast.²⁸
- In the spring of 1948, provincial officials re-imposed a 1902 regulation banning Japanese Canadians from working as loggers in the forests that were part of a crown grant.²⁹
- In order to assure that Japanese Canadians could not return to the coast, the provincial government agreed to pay half the costs related to the continuing exile of JCs beginning on March 31, 1948.³⁰

In Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper, accumulated randomly over the past five years, constitutes a pretty clear case that the provincial government was not only heavily complicit in the uprooting but was also a prime instigator.

Its actions deepened and prolonged the injustices committed by the federal government. The point here is not to cast blame but rather to prod the provincial government to step up to the plate and acknowledge and address its responsibilities so that we can get on with the work of transcending our colonial past.

In the wake of the Chinese Canadian Legacy Initiatives, and with a provincial election approaching, the provincial government took the initiative through Heritage B.C. to launch the Japanese Canadian Historic Places Recognition Project on 7 July 2016. A similar program was established for historic sites of significance for the South Asian community in September 2016. While such programs are long overdue, they are not a substitute for serious

Seventy-Five Years is Long Enough

Will the B.C. Government Finally Acknowledge and Address Its Role in the Uprooting of Japanese Canadians?

government acknowledgments of the wrongs committed against Asian Canadians or First Nations.

In 1988, the Japanese Canadian redress movement obliged the federal government to acknowledge the uprooting as a gross injustice and obtained a redress settlement that remains a landmark in Canadian history. The provincial government, however, used that settlement to divert attention from its own central role in the uprooting. Furthermore, it failed to take any substantial measures to integrate the story of the uprooting in educational curricula until obliged to do so by Japanese Canadians.

Next year, the Smithsonian National Museum of American History will mark the 75th anniversary of the internment of Japanese Americans with a year-long exhibit featuring the original Executive Order 9066. It has begun a campaign to reach out to the affected communities and to identify and gather artifacts. No such initiative is taking place in B.C. or Canada to my knowledge, although local museums and municipalities have recently taken some initiative to recognize their local roles in the uprooting. The provincial silence grows louder each day.

Whatever approach is finally taken to address the issues discussed herein, it must include serious government negotiations with representative community organizations and avoid any semblance of electoral positioning for 'quick wins'. In the process the parties might consider public consultations, thorough documentation of the provincial government's actions, substantial measures including comprehensive education and heritage reform, as well as compensation to affected parties where appropriate. These points apply to any acknowledgment for the uprooting of Japanese Canadians but they also apply to others, including the South Asian communities. It is untenable that

individual communities be singled out for electoral reasons or otherwise, for special treatment.

For Japanese Canadians, 75 years is long enough and the people of this province deserve to know the truth. For First Nations, 175 years have passed since the onset of colonization. It is time the provincial government comes clean on its past, breaks the current logjam, and permits us all to get on with achieving justice and reconciliation.

John Price teaches history at the University of Victoria. He is the director of the project "[Asian Canadians on Vancouver Island: Race, Indigeneity and the Transpacific](#)". His ancestors took land from the Kwantlen peoples 100 years ago in Langley, B.C.

Notes

- 1 Bev Sellars, *Price Paid: The Fight for First Nations Survival* (Vancouver, B.C.: Talon Books, 2016), 9.
- 2 The term 'uprooting' is used in the rest of this essay to denote not only displacement but also the exile, dispossession and deportation of Japanese Canadians.
- 3 The results of that study form a chapter of a book currently being completed, 'Beyond White Supremacy: Race, Indigeneity and the Pacific Coast.
- 4 For an overview of the federal settlement see Roy Miki and Cassandra Kobayashi, *Justice in Our Time: The Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1991).
- 5 In particular, Roy Miki's *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver, B.C.: Raincoast Book, 2004); Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); and Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981) now available without charge on-line at <http://www.japanesecanadianhistory.ca>.
- 6 7 May 2012 British Columbia Debates 11578 <https://www.leg.bc.ca/content/Hansard/39th4th/H0507pm-02.pdf>, Accessed 16 February, 2016. Yamamoto also provided a heartfelt personal story when introducing the motion.

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- 7 See Matt James, "Scaling Memory: Reparation Displacement and the Case of B.C.," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 42:2 (June 2009), 363-386.
- 8 For details see <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/multiculturalism-anti-racism/chinese-legacy-bc>. Select information is also contained in an appendix to this report.
- 9 Henry Yu, "How Does a Province Say Its Sorry" 20 March 2014, *Vancouver Sun*.
- 10 For the sake of full disclosure, in 2014 the BC government approached me to undertake a project to compile a publicly accessible on-line database of Chinese Canadians artifacts held by local museums on Vancouver Island and the mainland as part of its Legacy Initiative. I received a \$90,000 research grant for this purpose and the project culminated with the launch of the database in July 2016.
- 11 D.M. Eberts to Christopher Robinson, K.C., "In Re Tomey Homma," 29 June 1901, as reproduced in the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 3 January 1903.
- 12 The long list of discriminatory legislation is currently being reviewed by the government and doesn't seem to be on the government website. A PDF of the original list is available upon request.
- 13 Such a term may discomfort some but the UN definition of ethnic cleansing is "rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove from a given area persons of another ethnic or religious group". For details see Hayden, Robert M. (1996) "Schindler's Fate: Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, and Population Transfers". *Slavic Review* 55 (4), 727-48.
- 14 G. Neil Perry to Colonel E. Pepler, Deputy Attorney-General, 10 August 1940, GR 268, 14.3, *British Columbia Archives*. Thanks to Chris Hanna to bringing these documents to our attention.
- 15 See *Victoria Daily Times*, 18 December 1941, 2.
- 16 For first-hand accounts of this meeting, see Maurice A. Pope, *Soldiers and Politicians: The Memoirs of Lt.-Gen. Maurice A. Pope* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962) and Escott Reid, *Radical Mandarin: The Memoirs of Escott Reid* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).
- 17 "B.C. Government to Create Permanent Postwar Committee," 31 January 1942, *Victoria Daily Times*.
- 18 "Enemy Aliens Must Leave Coastal Area of B.C. Before April 1," *British Daily Colonist*, 14 February 1942, 2
- 19 John Hart to M.F. Hunter, Esq., 16 February 1942 (CVA, CSR 13, Special Communication Received, Province).
- 20 As cited in Patricia Roy, *Triumph of Citizenship*, ft. 79, 328.
- 21 Council of Public Instruction, Order-in-Council, 20 February 1942. Appreciation to Patrick Dunae who unearthed this document a number of years ago.
- 22 "Winch Insists Japs' Removal Be Immediate," 23 February, 1942, *VDT*, 13.
- 23 *British Columbia Security Commission, Removal of Japanese from Protected Areas: Report Issued by the British Columbia Security Commission (Vancouver, 1942)*.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 E.H. Bridgman, Deputy Minister, Municipal Affairs to M.F. Hunter, City Clerk, "Re: Japanese Taxation Questions," 15 October, 1942, CSR 13, *City of Victoria Archives*. My thanks to Jenny Clayton for finding these documents.
- 26 Numerous sources affirm this policy though the related correspondence has not been made public. See, for example, Frank Moritsugu and the Ghost Town Teachers Historical Society, *Teaching in Canadian Exile*, (Toronto: Ghost Town Teachers Historical Society, 2001), 3.
- 27 The BC legislature appointed a special committee on elections in 1946 that held hearings in Vancouver and Victoria that fall. For details see *Journals of the Legislative Assembly*, 19 February, 1947.
- 28 See Ann Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism*, 149.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 150.
- 30 See *Cabinet Committee on Japanese Questions, Minutes*, 15 January 1948, Record Group 25, Vol. 1868, 1939-263, 4, *Library and Archives Canada*.



Appendix: Provincial Government Report and Apology re Chinese Canadians

The report recommended that any apology and related initiatives:

- Reflect the principles of respect, sincerity and commitment to reconciliation
- Be brought forward by the Premier
- Update education curricula
- Public education initiatives and publication on Chinese Canadian history
- Review legislation to assure all racist measures repealed and a process introduced to prevent racist legislation from coming back
- Identification and recognition of historic sites
- Funding of \$1 million towards legacy initiatives.
- Integration and coordination of legacy initiatives
- No individual redress for the head tax

Subsequently the provincial legislature voted unanimously on May to issue an official apology:

Be it resolved that this Legislature apologizes for more than a hundred laws, regulations, and policies that were imposed by past provincial governments that discriminated against people of Chinese descent since 1871, when British Columbia joined Confederation, to 1947. These laws and policies denied British Columbia's Chinese communities' basic human rights, including but not limited to, the right to vote, hold public office, or own property; imposed labour, educational and employment restrictions; subjected them to health and housing segregation, and prevented them from fully participating in society. The House deeply regrets that these Canadians were discriminated against simply because they were of Chinese descent. All members of this House acknowledge that we all aspire to be a fair and just society where people of all nations and cultures are welcomed, accepted and respected.

Be it further resolved that the House acknowledge that the Chinese Canadian Community endured untold hardships and persevered with grace and dignity. We acknowledge that despite being subjected to discriminatory laws, policies and practices, the Chinese community has made, and continues to make, substantial contributions to the culture, history and economic prosperity in our province.

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White Supremacy, Political Violence, and Community: The Questions We Ask, from 1907 to 2017

📅 September 7, 2017 [💬 1 Comment](#)



Building damaged during Vancouver riot of 1907 – 130 Powell Street. UBC Archives, JCPC_36_017

Laura Ishiguro and Laura Madokoro



In recent weeks, we have seen white supremacist rallies in cities across North America, from Charlottesville to Quebec City. On each occasion, anti-fascist and anti-racist activists, along with other community members, have confronted these rallies with large and diverse counter-demonstrations, largely shutting them down, overwhelming them, or rendering them caricatures of their original plans. On 19 August, Vancouver was the site of one such confrontation. A planned anti-Islam rally at Vancouver's City Hall mostly failed to materialize alongside a [counter-protest of approximately 4000 people](#), organized by an ad hoc group, Stand Up To Racism Metro Vancouver.

As historians of migration and settler colonialism, we are reminded that these events – often represented as exceptional, new, or surprising – highlight much wider and older tensions in Canada. In particular, as we consider the recent events and their political stakes in Vancouver, we are struck by their resonance with something that happened in the city exactly 110 years ago today.

On Saturday 7 September 1907, Vancouver was gripped by one of the largest race riots in Canadian history. This event started with a large gathering of people who also marched on City Hall, in that case behind a banner that said: "Stand for a White Canada."^[1] After listening to fiery speeches against Asian immigration, a significant number then headed to Chinese and Japanese neighbourhoods in the city, where they wreaked extensive property damage, physical violence, and terror.

In thinking about the recent Stand Up To Racism event alongside the 1907 parade and riot, we could tell a story about how much has changed in a city now willing to turn out in numbers to drown out calls for a "White Canada." But we could equally tell a story about how little has changed in a settler colonial city still organized around inequality and rage, including ongoing anti-Asian racism. Both of these arguments would be important and well supported with evidence, but here we want to reflect on a different issue. What questions does the 1907 event raise for us, and how do these relate to the questions we might ask – or more pointedly, often fail to ask – of the present?

Vancouver, 1907

The 1907 Labour Day parade was organized by the Asiatic Exclusion League (AEL). Established in San Francisco in 1905, the League quickly established branches across the Pacific coast of North America. In Vancouver, the AEL was far from fringe, boasting members from a wide swath of society, including the mayor Alexander Bethune. Calling for the exclusion of Asian people from North America, the AEL was especially concerned about economic competition for white workers (blaming Asian workers for the low wages they were paid), and fearful of the social and cultural impact of migration from China, Japan and India. At the heart of the AEL's arguments was the shared conviction that Canada should be a "white" country – a position that ignored Indigenous people and their sovereignty, and the existing diversity of non-Indigenous people, including Asian people who had been in and integral to what is now British Columbia for as long as white people had been.



Despite the AEL's arguments and some government efforts to restrict Asian migration (including a 1903 increase to the head tax on Chinese migrants), Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian people continued to move to Canada in the early twentieth century. It was in this context that the Vancouver AEL organized the 1907 parade. On the day, five thousand people marched from the Cambie Street Grounds to City Hall on Westminster Avenue (now Main Street), weaving its way through the largely Japanese and Chinese neighbourhoods on the way. Another two thousand joined at City Hall where the crowd listened to speakers demanding a ban on Asian migration. The mood was defiant. They sang "Rule Britannia" and the "Maple Leaf Forever," then burned an effigy of Lieutenant Governor James Dunsmuir, who had recently prevented efforts by the BC legislature to pass further anti-Asian legislation.

Then approximately six or seven hundred people marched again through the nearby Chinese and Japanese neighbourhoods. There, the crowd started to throw rocks through windows. One resident of Chinatown later recalled:

We lived in Shanghai Alley...One store had lights on, and all the glass there was shattered. Papa came back and said, 'Don't put on the lights! And don't sit near the windows!' They were running through all the lanes, making all kinds of noise. We had no lights on, so they couldn't see us. We sat in the centre, so that if anything happened at either end, we could still run out.[2]

The violence was swift. Some reports indicate that the crowd was in Chinatown for only five minutes before moving to Powell Street, home to the city's growing Japanese community. Here the destruction escalated: property damages were estimated at \$1553.58 with an extra \$7842.42 in collateral damages.[3] The crowd's rage was not uncontrolled, but rather clearly targeted Asian residents. At the end of the night, windows in every Japanese and Chinese-run store in the area had been smashed, while Victoria's *Daily Colonist* noted "those of white people living adjacent or among them were left untouched."[4]

While the police made some arrests, it ultimately took the community's self-defence to stem the violence. Hearing the damage in nearby Chinatown, Japanese and Chinese residents met the rioters on Powell Street armed with whatever they could find, from sticks to broken glass. According to the *Daily Province*, they "poured forth into the streets as soon as the limit of their patience had been reached... Many of the Japanese went to the ground as stones thumped against their heads, but the insensible ones were carried off by friends, and the fight kept up till the mob wavered, broke and finally retreated."[5]

This stopped the majority of violence, but sporadic attacks continued for two more days. Japanese and Chinese people closed their stores and held back their labour while the attacks continued, instead holding mass meetings and patrolling their neighbourhoods. The impromptu strike meant that local sawmills and about a third of Vancouver's restaurants closed.[6] On Monday, community members put out a fire at the Japanese Primary School. Then, finally, the weekend's wave of overt violence abated.[7]



In the days that followed, Canadian politicians and the media decried what has been labelled a riot. On 10 September, the *Daily Colonist's* top headline proclaimed: "Vancouver hoodlums disgrace their city." Later in the issue, the editors clarified their position: they too were in favour of Asian exclusion, but property damage and violence in the streets were the wrong approach.[8] Politicians, labour leaders, and other journalists made similar cases. For them, the riot was an unrespectable and ineffective way to show support for Asian exclusion when compared to their primary tactics of parades, speeches, and policies. In other words, they were not concerned with the arguments, ideas, or emotions that drove the riot, but rather with the optics of mass violence.

This position became even clearer in the aftermath. Primarily concerned about the diplomatic implications of the riot, Prime Minister Laurier dispatched a young Mackenzie King to assess and address the damages. [9] In King's view, the roots of the riot – and the general unrest on the coast – lay with Asian migration. In this, he echoed many white Canadians who also blamed the violence on the migrants rather than the rioters. King's recommendations led to the 1907 Gentleman's Agreement between Canada and Japan, which limited migration to 400 men per year. This was not the total exclusion that the AEL demanded, but was still a significant restriction that specifically targeted Japanese people.

King's conviction that Canada should be a country for white people lingered long after the riot. Forty years later, he would declare in the House of Commons:

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 would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population.[10]

Overall, the riot and the federal government's response, exemplified by Mackenzie King's extended period in office, reveal the extent to which white supremacy was not only tolerated, but actually embedded in the mindsets of politicians and many other Canadians. While the government and media decried the violence, the longer-term result was an entrenching of the state's commitment to white supremacy and the escalated exclusion of Asian people through new immigration controls.

Reflections

While many discussions of recent white supremacist events have focused on their historical parallels to Nazi Germany or the United States, the 1907 parade and riot serve as one reminder of the long local and national history of white supremacy in Canada too. Anti-immigrant racism and violence have been integral to white supremacist visions of a "white Canada" for well over a century, whether taking the form of government policies, mass gatherings at city halls, or violence in the streets.

At the same time, the events of 1907 remind us of the importance of community action, memory, and education work. For too long, instead of thinking about riot as central to Canada's character, and the product

racial attitudes that imbued its governance at all levels, the events of 1907 were treated as an isolated incident, if thought about at all. But memories of the riot have endured powerfully within the Japanese, Chinese and South Asian communities in Vancouver. In 2007, a coalition of educators and community members staged an “Anniversaries of Change” event to mark the centennial of the 1907 riot, as well as the 1947 end of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1967 introduction of the universal immigration points system, and the 1997 handover of Hong Kong. The project involved curriculum development as well as a walk through the downtown core, which traced the 1907 events and acknowledged these other developments that have had a powerful impact on Asian communities in Canada. In a moment when commemoration is being hotly contested in the United States and Canada, from statues of Robert E. Lee to schools bearing the name of John A. Macdonald, it bears thinking about who does the work of remembering and commemorating histories that mainstream society would rather forget.

And finally, the 1907 parade and riot invite other questions that resonate today too. For instance, who is seen as violent and why? What gets called violence? What is seen as restoring order, and which order is that? There are no single answers to such questions. But by asking them, the events of the past offer an invitation to re-think critical issues that remain too-often unasked of the present.

***Laura Ishiguro** is an historian of settler colonialism and the family in Canada, and an Assistant Professor of History at the University of British Columbia on unceded Musqueam territory.*

***Laura Madokoro** is a historian and Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Classical Studies at McGill, which sits on on land that has long served as a site of meeting and exchange among Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations.*

Notes

[1] John Price, “‘Orienting’ the Empire: Mackenzie King and the Aftermath of the 1907 Race Riots,” *BC Studies* 156/157 (2007): 59.

[2] Lillian Ho Wong in Paul Yee, *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2006), 28.

[3] The Bank of Canada’s Inflation Calculator only calculates historical inflation between 1914 and 2017. However, to provide a rough translation of these damages to today’s Canadian dollar, we used the 1914

rates; with those, the costs of the riot would be equivalent to approximately \$34 336.75 and \$173 330.77 today.

[4] *Daily Colonist*, 10 September 1907.

[5] *Daily Province*, 9 September 1907.

[6] *Daily Colonist*, 10 September 1907.

[7] For more on the parade and riot, see Price, "'Orienting' the Empire"; Erika Lee, "Hemispheric Orientalism and the 1907 Pacific Coast Race Riots," *Amerasia Journal* 33, 2 (2007): 19-48; and Julie Gilmour, "Interpreting Social Disorder: The Case of the 1907 Vancouver Riots," *International journal* 67, 2 (2012): 483-495.

[8] *Daily Colonist*, 10 September 1907.

[9] For details on the events in Vancouver in 1907 and their impact on Mackenzie King's career, see Julie Gilmour *Trouble on Main Street: Mackenzie King, Reason, Race, and the 1907 Vancouver Riots* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2014).

[10] Mackenzie King, *House of Commons Debates*, 1 May 1947.

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The Parable of the Textbook: Education, Meritocracy, and Why History Matters

Henry Yu, Department of History, UBC, and Principal, St. John's Graduate College,
UBC

From *"Too Asian?" Race, Privilege and Post-Secondary Education*, RJ Gilmour, Davina Bhandar, Jeet Heer, and Michael C.K. Ma, editors, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012)

Introduction: This book takes its impetus from the outpouring of anger and activism that emerged in the wake of the *Macleans* article. In response to the dialogue that developed in December 2010 we issued a call for submissions to address the issues the article raised. We heard from all parts of the campus and sought to give space to as many diverse voices as possible. The authors are academics, graduate students, activists, journalists, and teachers who range across the disciplines from history, journalism, media studies, feminist and gender studies to law and social work.

The first three chapters engage and challenge the idea of meritocracy and affirmative action policies. Henry Yu examines the way meritocracy is used to deflect attention from past racism in "The Parable of the Textbook." Using a startlingly effective allegory that many teachers will want to borrow for their own classes, Yu demonstrates how historical legacies of white privilege come to the fore when people grapple with issues of who gets admitted to colleges and universities. He also addresses the *Macleans* article's distorted picture of affirmative action debates in the United States. *Jeet Heer, editor*

After the *Macleans* article "Too Asian?" evoked widespread outrage, the magazine issued an opinion piece defending its article. In a short statement entitled "Merit: The Best and Only Way to Decide Who Gets into University,"¹ issued on November 25, 2010, the editors attempted to defuse the reaction to their story by explaining that rather than publishing a sensationalist story that disingenuously used anti-Asian provocation, they had in fact been making a principled anti-racist stand. *Macleans* bought full-page advertisements in three major Chinese-language newspapers to translate into Chinese their "regret" that some Chinese may have felt offended by their story about

¹ <http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/11/25/who-gets-into-university/>

universities being “Too Asian,” but nevertheless defending their story as good journalism. What was particularly offensive about this non-apologetic non-apology was their evasion of the main issues raised by their article. Rather than dealing with the racially inflammatory nature of their article, the editors tried to rewrite the meaning of their story, asserting that their story was in fact a principled stand against the adoption of U.S.-inspired admissions caps on Asian students.

It was a classic bait-and-switch, using selective quoting from their article to claim that readers were misreading their original intention. What they wrote, they insinuated, was not what they meant--what they actually meant to say was in other parts of the story not being quoted by Maclean’s critics. The *Macleans* non-apology claimed that the article’s main purpose was to defend Canadian universities as “pure meritocracies.” They studiously ignored the extensive segments of their original article that trafficked in racial stereotypes of “Asians” as too hardworking and socially stunted and a threat to “Canadian” students. They also sidestepped the article’s consistent equation of “Canadian” students with “white”—as many readers had observed, *Macleans*’ use of the term “Asian” to describe some students was invariably in contrast to the term “Canadian” to describe “white” students throughout the article, a dubious assignation that “Asians” were somehow foreign and non-Canadian.

Rather than being a principled stand for anti-racism, the actual (and nefarious) foundation of *Macleans* article was a continual insinuation that something had gone wrong with Canada’s top universities, and that the cause was that they had somehow become “too Asian.” Despite the editors attempt at a rhetorical sleight of hand, their article was not, as they claimed, a principled antiracist stand calling for Canada to defend

meritocracy against American race-based admissions. The main point of their article was the statement—clearly made—that there was a problem on Canadian campuses caused by too many "Asian" students. That is what the title “Too Asian?” referenced—not a nonexistent movement by Canadian universities to adopt U.S. admissions policies.

The editors proffered the absurd claim that their title was borrowed from an “authoritative source” from the United States, and therefore not really of their own making. But if a careful reader goes to the [original article](#)² in 2006 that used the title "Too Asian," a careful reader would quickly realize that the *Macleans* story took the main idea of that story—that Asian Americans only seemed to want to apply to prestigious schools, and therefore less prestigious schools faced a challenge of convincing Asian American parents and students to apply to their schools—and twisted it to support their own story’s sensationalist lead that Canada’s universities might have become “too Asian.”

The references in the *Macleans* article to a history of elite Ivy League universities informally putting “caps” on admitting Asian American students were put forth as an alternative to Canadian admission policies. The article wrote that Canadian universities were not “likely” to adopt such policies, but the clear insinuation was that without considering such policies or some other solution, Canadian universities would be left with the problem of too many Asian students.

Raising the specter of U.S.-style admission caps on “Asian” students in Canada was misleading and a rhetorical red herring. Except for a few exclusive universities in the 1980s and 1990s, no school in the U.S. wanted fewer Asian American students; in fact they were considered prize students to be recruited, as is indicated in the 2006 article

² Scott Jaschick, “Too Asian,” *Inside Higher Ed* (October 2006)
<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/10/10/asian>

from where they borrowed the phrase “Too Asian.” Capping the number of Asian American students was never the intention of the vast majority of U.S. universities.

Where did *Macleans* get this notion that they were honourably defending “merit” based admissions policies against American racist policies? Interestingly, the idea that only considering “merit” in university admissions would result in more Asian American students being admitted was the product of anti-affirmative action debates in the United States in the 1990s. I taught at UCLA during a politically contentious fight about removing affirmative action from public universities. A California state initiative had been put on the election ballot (“Proposition 209”), which if passed would make it illegal in California for public universities to consider racial categories in their admission policies. The argument seemed to be against racism, and yet it was clever in its appeal to remove policies designed to counteract the long historical legacy of white supremacy.

Affirmative action policies had been designed in the 1970s to redress inequities created by over a century of racial discrimination in employment and school admissions policies in the United States. For instance, if a municipal fire department had for decades implemented a racially discriminatory policy of never hiring non-whites no matter how well qualified they were for the job, then the fact that this fire department did not have a single non-white fire fighter was an obvious legacy of that long history of racial discrimination. Affirmative action policies were designed to force that fire department to begin hiring non-whites as soon as possible, often based upon the idea that if two candidates for a new job opening were equally qualified, and one was white and the other non-white, then the non-white candidate should be chosen. This seeming preference for the non-white candidate when all other things were equal was an explicit attempt to

overcome the effects of a long history of racial exclusion when qualified non-white candidates had been systematically denied employment because of their race.

The question of what constituted a proper “qualification” for a job was crucial. The use of elaborate definitions of job qualifications, often seemingly non-racial, had long been used to support white supremacist hiring policies. Racist policies were sometimes based upon a straightforward and explicit argument that whites were simply superior to non-whites, but a much more common and disingenuous form of white supremacy was to create discriminatory policies that were justified by arguments that non-whites lacked specific qualities or that whites were stronger in the characteristics that were considered vital for particular positions. The basic premise was to establish a system of qualifications that left non-whites unqualified for positions reserved for whites; the preferential hiring of whites was therefore based upon their possession of qualities that non-white candidates did not have, rendering non-white candidates inferior. The argument could then be made that racial preferences were based upon meritocratic considerations.

Non-whites could be considered superior in characteristics that were more suited for positions that paid lower wages or were considered below positions reserved for whites—for instance blacks were physically “stronger” and thus suited to manual labor, or Asians were better at cooking or cleaning, and so best suited for lower paying jobs in those areas. White supremacist policies often used merit-based measuring sticks to justify why non-whites were not hired for better paid positions, in particular management and leadership positions. In other words, merit, or a meritocratic system of evaluating who

deserved the best positions in society, was historically often supportive rather than undermining of white supremacy.

By the 1990s, after decades of resisting civil rights legislation designed to give equal rights to non-whites, many political conservatives in the U.S. switched tactics. Rather than defending white supremacy and arguing that non-whites did not deserve the same rights as white Americans, the argument now being made was that policies designed to counteract racism were themselves racist. Many on the political right began to attack affirmative action policies as going too far in the attempt to redress white supremacy. For instance, one of the arguments used was that if only “merit” was considered, more Asian and “white” students would be admitted to prestigious universities, and fewer “undeserving” African American and Hispanic students. Merit was often measured simply by grade point average (GPA) or standardized test scores such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and even statistically minor differences in GPAs or SATs between students was seen as an indication of one being more deserving than another.

Much was made of the idea that affirmative action policies hurt Asian Americans, and therefore were discriminatory. The argument that Asian Americans were being harmed was useful because it blunted the obvious political weakness of the argument that policies designed to counter white supremacy and the racial privileges of being white might effectively harm whites. How could any policy designed to make the historically unfair racial distribution of resources fair not have such an effect? But if affirmative action policies could be seen as actually harming a group of non-whites (Asians), then a

disingenuous argument could be made that they needed to be dismantled and the long held privileges and benefits of white supremacy quietly maintained.

Used as a wedge issue to split anti-racist coalitions that had brought together many groups that had historically suffered similar forms of racial discrimination (ie African Americans, Asian Americans, non-white Hispanic Americans), this appeal to Asian Americans was clever and divisive. By rhetorically painting Asian Americans as a “non-white group” harmed by anti-racism policies, a long history of white supremacy could be ignored. Policies designed to counteract such a history were now labeled as racist in themselves because they were seen to harm a non-white group.

The concepts of “merit” and “color blind” policies became linked. Being “color blind” meant that admissions to universities, or hiring for jobs, should never take race into account. Color blindness was seemingly the conceptual opposite of racism, since racists took a person’s skin color into account, and therefore to ignore or be blind to the color of a person’s skin was arguably the opposite of being racist. It was a simple and appealing argument. If a university only took grades into account when deciding admissions, for instance, then the process was technically blind to skin color and therefore meritocratic. Merit—defined as the ability to achieve better grades in high school or higher scores on standardized tests—should be the only criteria.

In actual effect, in case after case, the most important consequence of the removal of affirmative action policies at California public universities with the passage of Proposition 209 was that the number of African American students admitted to highly competitive programs (for instance the Law School at UCLA in the year immediately after the removal of affirmative action policies), was that the number of African

American students admitted fell from an already small number to almost none, or none at all. In the year after Proposition 209 was passed, the handful of African American applicants who would have been admitted to UCLA Law School the year before but were now denied entrance had grade point averages that were statistically insignificant in difference from the applicants who had been admitted just ahead of them. Even those who strongly believed that only “merit” should be considered for entrance to law schools or medical schools were hard pressed to defend the idea that a society without any African American lawyers or doctors was somehow a better society. But there was now no mechanism to argue that there might be a greater social good ultimately to have at least a few African American students in the law school, and eventually a few African American lawyers graduating from UCLA Law School.

The simple equation that a slightly higher grades point average, even just a fraction of a percentage point, led to a better doctor or lawyer years later, was clearly absurd in practice. All kinds of factors, for instance, might lead to the training of a good doctor—their ability to empathize with patients, their ingenuity and creativity in diagnosing patients and solving problems, their ability to work well with others in efficient and productive ways. And yet the abstract notion that “merit”—as defined by grades and standardized test scores—needed to be defended at all costs in order to create a “color blind” society became popular. Despite obvious negative effects such as the catastrophic drop in the number of African American students in many university programs, admissions policies that were “meritocratic” and “color blind” became an abstract ideal.

But what is “merit”? And how does an abstract adherence to “color blindness” actually exacerbate and reinforce the historical legacies of racism rather than curing them? Perhaps the best way to illustrate the challenges of overcoming white supremacy and the historical inequalities it created is by telling a parable.

The Parable of the Textbook

Imagine that I am teaching a class. There is a textbook for the class, and according to my syllabus, at the end of each week I will give an examination that tests the students on that week’s lectures and textbook readings. However, at the beginning of the first day of class, I decide to only give half of the students the textbook. I do this by arranging the class list alphabetically and reading out family names, starting with A and giving out textbooks until they run out, somewhere around those with last names beginning with L or M.

Very quickly, after several weeks of class, it becomes clear that those students who were given textbooks do much better on the weekly exams than those who were not given textbooks. Students whose names begin with P or T begin to complain, and eventually to protest their unfair treatment. They claim that there is an “alphabetism” in the class that gives some people better treatment just because of the letters of their name. An “anti-alphabetist” movement begins, complete with marches and letters to the administration and by the middle of the semester, the protests are so powerful that I am forced to change the system.

I publicly apologize for the mistakes of the past, and tell the class that a new day dawns, with a future together that has left behind forever the inequities of our history. From now on, we will never again consider the alphabet, and only judge students by the content of their character, not by the letters of their name.

I gather back all of the textbooks and explain that instead of using the alphabet to distribute textbooks, I will immediately change the system so that it is fair and judges students only by merit. I have ranked the students of the class by their grades, I explain. Starting with the best student with the highest grade and working down the ranking list, I give out the new textbooks one after another to those who are the most deserving based upon their accomplishments.

I announce that from now on, our class is an “alphabet-blind” meritocracy, and those that complain need to shut up and start working hard instead of blaming their failures on “alphabetism.” I point out several “model” students who never received textbooks at the beginning of class, but despite the stigma of having a name beginning with T or Z, they were still able to get high marks in the class.

Indeed, the student with the highest grade in the class had a name beginning with W! Even without a textbook, she listened attentively to lecture and took detailed notes. Because I had felt pity for the students without textbooks, I had put one copy on reserve at the library, and she had woken up every morning at the crack of dawn before the library even opened just so she could get to that copy first. Her example should shame those lazy students who spent their semester protesting and complaining instead of working hard like she did. She made the most of her limited resources.

I point out another group of students--the brotherhood of those whose names begin with Q—who had banded together and bought a photocopy of the textbook that a student had secretly made. It had been expensive to buy this illegal copy, but together they shared the costs and also took turns using the textbook each night. What a wonderful example of working together! They well deserved the high marks they achieved, I lecture, proudly pointing out the Q students and asking them to stand.

Weeks later, as the final exam approaches, many students continue to grumble and complain that the system is unfair. They know that their ranking at the end of the class will determine the kinds of jobs they receive, and how many opportunities they will have for the rest of their lives. Many who are receiving low grades worry about how this class will affect their future.

Unfair? I exclaim. What could you mean? This is now a meritocratic system. If you cannot do well, then it must be your own fault. Look to yourself and take the example of student W, or the Brotherhood of the Q—hard work and ingenuity allowed them to succeed even when alphabetism was systemic—now that alphabetism is gone your failure must be your own responsibility. Why can't you just get over the past? Stop using history as an excuse.

The students accuse me of being an alphabetist. My anger boils. Accusing me of being an alphabetist? We are no longer using an alphabetist system. How dare you blame me for your own faults! We are an alphabet-blind meritocracy, and those who deserve more, receive more—those who deserve less, receive less. Do you want to return to a system where we care about a student's name? Just because your name is N or X, you are

no longer treated differently. *Work hard and ye shall be judged by your accomplishments.*
I do not see your name, but only how well you perform.

It is *you* who is an alphabetist, I explain. Are you accusing the students with names like B and G of being alphabetist? They studied hard both before and now. You should be ashamed of bringing up the past again when it has no relevance.

Feeling defensive and emotional, I plead, “What is wrong with an Alphabet-Blind system that treats everyone fairly and equally?” I ask my students.

What is wrong, indeed?

The new system is fair in concept. Being “alphabet-blind” is a worthy ideal to replace the unfairness of “alphabetism.” But something is not quite right.

Indeed, a new system that is fair in ideal has actually reinforced the unfairness of the past. By ranking the students by grades achieved during a period of inequality, and continuing to reward those who accomplished the most under that system, the “alphabet-blind” system actually extends and exacerbates the inequities of the past.

Worse yet, being alphabet-blind in fact hides the unfairness of the past. By claiming that the present and future is now fair and meritocratic, it literally blinds us to the unfairness of the past and erases the effects of the first half of the semester.

Students whose names begin with C or G can quite rightly say that they bear no responsibility for the past, and that they deserve what they have. Indeed, they can argue with complete and understandable sincerity that they have always worked hard for what they have. The new “alphabet-blind” system will quickly confirm that the grades received before will mirror the grades they will receive in the last half of the semester, since their

hard work and study will likely have the same effect. They had textbooks then, and have textbooks now.

The privileges of alphabetism as a system did not mean that lazy students with textbooks did not have to study. If there were students with names starting with D or F who preferred to drink alcohol and never cracked open their textbooks, they would quite rightly be punished with a low grade and lessened opportunities if they ever graduate. Indeed, everyone during the semester who achieved high grades had to work hard.

Now go back through the Parable and replace the word “alphabet” with “colour” or “race.” (In case I am unclear by being too allegorical, think of the students with W last names as the “Asians,” and the students whose names are at the beginning of the alphabet as “whites.”) The example of the students with names like “Wong” who overcame the lack of textbooks through harder work and ingenuity can be extolled as a model for all, treated unfairly in a system where alphabetical hierarchy treated them as second class students, but they were nevertheless able to succeed despite their disadvantages. Furthermore, the accomplishments of these “model minority” students play an important role in supporting the ideal of a meritocracy. Through hard work, they have overcome inequality and their mastery of the measuring sticks of grading reinforces the idea that grades and merit are the basis of a fair system.

In the United States, the idealization of Asian Americans as a “model minority” began in the 1960s, when Japanese Americans began to be considered as having been a “success story” in the United States despite a long history of anti-Japanese racial discrimination and the devastating effects of internment during World War II. Soon after, Chinese Americans and other Americans of East Asian descent were being celebrated for

the same overcoming of adversity through quiet hard work. The rise of this narrative of “model minority” success at the same time that the civil rights movement was at its height was no coincidence, and despite the implicit manner in which Asian Americans were being compared to African Americans, the insidious effects of such a divisive racial stereotype were sometimes even missed by Asian Americans themselves.

Despite the fact that representations of Asians as ‘too hard working’ had been used to justify anti-Asian discrimination and exclusionary immigration legislation for over a century, this seemingly positive description of Asian Americans as a hard working minority became rampant in discourses of race in the United States.

At first glance, the moral of this Parable is about the arbitrary nature of racism and prejudice. We talk constantly about having a colour-blind society where we no longer have racial prejudice. However, the crux of this Parable is not about prejudice or race, but about the unequal distribution of resources (textbooks) and how this has lingering legacies.

Notice how a definition of “alphabetism” based upon prejudice often obscures what is really important. If someone whose name begins with B says that “all people with X names are stupid,” this would be bigoted and should be discouraged. But the real issue is whether an alphabet-blind meritocracy erases the systematic legacies of past injustice.

In asking whether we are “Too Q” or “Too W” that the Macleans editors have so idiotically incited with their “Too Asian?” framework, we are not discussing what we should.

Whenever I tell this Parable, there are two lessons that I hope my own students understand: 1) that history matters, and those whose names are B and D, or Q and W, who did well under both the old and new system should be sympathetic to those who still struggle to overcome the legacies of the past, and 2) that we might ask ourselves how “merit” and “fairness” help us and sometimes do not help us create a just society from an unjust history.

In order to add another allegorical meaning to my parable, let me bring in how Canadian immigration policy has affected racial representations of “Asians” as both an idealized model minority and at the same time a racial threat. Over the last four decades, since the immigration reform of 1967 removed racial preferences in Canadian immigration policy, the “points system” has been implemented to create selective immigration policies that cherry pick educated professionals from other parts of the world. Increasingly, universities also target the recruitment of top “foreign students” from all around the globe.

If you wanted to use my textbook parable as a way of understanding the effects of selective immigration policy, imagine that during the semester of my alphabetism, I decide that in order to raise the grade point average of my class, I will go next door to my colleague’s classroom and try to convince all of the best students from that class to transfer over to my class. Though out the semester, I succeed in creating a continual influx of high achieving students with top marks who quietly move into my classroom.

But the cost to them is that they have to pay more for the textbook in order to transfer (a lot more). Why would they do it? Perhaps I have convinced them that I am a better teacher than theirs, or that graduates of my class will do better in the job market than their existing class.

When the university administration conducts its regular review of my teaching, I proudly point to these high achieving students. I emphasize in particular the students whose names begin with Q or W. They have the same names as the overachieving students who overcame alphabetism through hard work in the first half of the semester, and I marvel that there must be some cultural secret for success that the Q and W students possess. “We have no problems with alphabetism,” I proudly state to my superiors. Just look how well students of every name and background are doing! I also point out that I must be an incredibly effective teacher since my class is so full of students with such fantastic grades. I neglect to mention that I only entice the best students to come over to my class, and therefore my claim that their achievements are the result of what and how I teach is probably more than a little self-aggrandizing.

In thinking about how a highly selection immigration and foreign student policy has affected racial representations of “Asians” in Canada over the last half century, it is crucial to keep conceptually separate the historical effects of white supremacy from the more recent demographic transformations due to migration. Historically, white supremacist policies such as the Chinese Head Tax, the Indian Act and the creation of the reserve system and residential schools, Asian immigration exclusion, Japanese Canadian internment, and the disenfranchisement of Asians and First Nations and Aboriginal peoples in Canada, created a society where the unequal distribution of resources and

privileges by race systematically shaped every institution of Canadian society. For instance, Chinese and South Asians could not become Canadian citizens and could not vote until 1947, and First Nations and Aboriginals in Canada could not vote until 1960, and this disenfranchisement meant that they could not become professionals such as doctors, engineers, or lawyers).

That many Asian Canadians and indigenous peoples in Canada have overcome such adversity to lead successful and productive lives is a credit to their perseverance and hard work in the face of enormous historical obstacles. However, the accomplishments of more recent generations of Asian immigrants to Canada need to be understood as a separate phenomenon from the historical legacies of white supremacy and their effects on earlier generations. In particular, the adverse effects on First Nations and Aboriginals in Canada of decades of ethnic cleansing and systematic attempts at cultural genocide in the form of the reserve system and residential schools have left far ranging consequences that have hardly begun to be addressed.

“Model minority” Asian Canadians who are doing well now should remember that once they were the targets of the same racism that still afflicts so many—indigenous peoples, Muslim Canadians, and perhaps most insidiously those many “Asians” who are not held up as a “model minority.” As always, the need always remains for broad-based coalitions of a wide array of Canadians who recognize that the historical legacies of white supremacy cannot be wished away by merely asserting that we now live in a colour-blind meritocracy. We have universities full of high achieving, hard working students of all different backgrounds. But we also need to continually ask ourselves what a university education means, and what the role of universities are in creating a diverse range of

students who will help build a better society. Grades are only one measure of a person, and in the end the most important determination of a student's potential to give back to society may be what resources we give to that student as an investment for our future.

We should also ask ourselves finally, as my students often point out as the most obvious lesson of the Parable of the Textbook, and yet one that so many miss if they believe that in a purely meritocratic world those who are deprived somehow deserve their deprivation: *Why do we not just give every student a textbook?*

Dr. Henry Yu is a professor of history at the University of British Columbia. He is currently writing a book entitled "Pacific Canada," which argues for a perspective on our society that recognizes the inequities of our past and rebuilds in a collaborative manner a new approach to our common history and future together.



CULTIVATING CANADA

Reconciliation through the Lens
of Cultural Diversity

EDITED BY ASHOK MATHUR,
JONATHAN DEWAR, MIKE DEGAGNÉ

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RECONCILIATION THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Edited by
Ashok Mathur
Jonathan Dewar
Mike DeGagné

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Nurturing Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal, and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver

During 2010, I had the privilege of being involved with a unique process organized by the City of Vancouver. Recognizing that in Vancouver we stood at a historic juncture in which new immigrant communities have transformed the populations of our city, we began a conversation that we hoped would allow for the creation of a common future together for immigrant and Aboriginal communities. Moving forward meant creating a new vision of Canada that recognized a history of injustices to both Aboriginal people and non-white immigrants. This terrible history—wrought by white supremacist policies of land dispossession, residential schooling, immigrant exclusion, and racial discrimination in voting, housing, and employment—needed to be acknowledged and its legacies made widely known before a more optimistic future could be envisioned together. We hoped that if this process could be started in Vancouver, it might also inspire other cities and regions of Canada to undergo a similar process of dialogue that would help lay the groundwork for a transformation of our society.

As one of three co-chairs, along with Councillor H. Wade Grant of the Musqueam Nation and Susan Tatoosh, Executive Director of Vancouver's Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society, the Steering Committee was a diverse group of representatives from Vancouver's local First Nations of Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh, from urban Aboriginal organizations, immigrant settlement organizations, neighbourhood houses, and academics from local universities. The Steering Committee was formed to help advise city social planner Baldwin Wong and Dialogues project coordinator Karen Fong in helping plan and implement a series of dialogue circles involving members of local First Nations, urban Aboriginal, and immigrant communities.¹ The Steering Committee recognized that many new arrivals in Canada received very little information about the history of Aboriginal people and, in particular, of the devastating effects of governmental policies such as residential schooling; therefore, through no intention of their own, they were often left only with stereotypes and the negative images of popular culture as the basis for their knowledge about Aboriginal people.

What could be generated, we wondered, if we could organize a dialogue process in which small groups engaged and thoughtful participants from Aboriginal and immigrant communities could speak and listen to each other in a safe and secure environment? How could we help begin to address the gaps of knowledge that existed, so that as our society continues to be changed by new arrivals, they can work together with First Nations and Aboriginal people on building better communities through a process of shared understanding rather than ignorance and misapprehension? Could we produce together from these dialogues a story of who we are, where we are, and who we aspire to be?

Who am I? Where am I? What is an immigrant? Who was here first?

My name in English is Henry Yu. My Cantonese name is 余全毅, and I was born in Vancouver in the year of Canada's Centennial. My maternal grandfather, Yeung Sing Yew, and his brothers and their father before them, came to British Columbia from Zhongshan county in Guangdong province in China. My parents, Yu Shing Chit and Yeung Kon Yee, came to Canada three years before I was born, joining a community of family and kin who had been crossing the Pacific back and forth for over 150 years. This is my story, my history, and I tell it this way to acknowledge that although I was born here, my family comes from somewhere else, and like all the migrants whose families came to Vancouver from somewhere else, we have made our home on the unceded traditional territory of the Coast Salish people. During the Dialogues Project, urban Aboriginal participants invariably acknowledged, during their stories of "who they were," a story at the same time about the First Nations or Métis communities somewhere else in BC or Canada or the United States from which they or their families came. This story about "where they were from" was at the same time an important acknowledgement about where they were now—that they now lived on someone else's territory as a guest.

It seems like such a simple thing to acknowledge that my family comes from somewhere else and that, except for the First Nations who were here before migrants arrived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from across the Atlantic and Pacific, we are all late arrivals. But in Vancouver, in British Columbia, and in Canada in general, stories of arrival and claims about belonging are fraught with violence. Oftentimes the violence has been physical—involving the removal and abuse of bodies—but the violence has also been a very effective narrative violence, a mythic story of dispossession and possession that renders damage by distorting and celebrating the stories of some people, while silencing and erasing the stories of others.

I was born here, but when I was growing up, the history I learned in school was a collection of stories I could not recognize. "Our" story, I was told, was

of people who came from across the water far away, who rode a train across a vast land and built a place called Canada. Some of those people had English names, and some of them had French names. But somehow my grandfather and great-grandfather and people with names like mine were missing. I remember, just once, hearing that the Chinese had helped build the railroad upon which the Canadians rode, but then they disappeared into silence for the rest of the story. What were they doing the rest of the time?

In the third grade, my teacher asked us to build models of either the traditional long houses or the ocean canoes of the Coast Salish people. Since I was eight years old and forbidden at home to use a sharp knife, my older brother helped me carve a canoe out of balsa wood, based upon a picture we found in a library book. I was so proud of my little carving, and after the class celebrated our achievements, I kept the canoe on my desk at home all the way into high school. Seeing it reminded me of the lesson that day in school, about how Native people had lived here before the arrival of Europeans. It was the last time in school that I remember being asked to think about the Aboriginal people in whose land we lived. What were they doing the rest of the time?

The rest of the time.

It is this silent erasure of time that tells another set of histories. Stories ignored or kept in the narrow margins in the sidebars of textbooks. Stories erased from our common past. It is not that the story of my grandfather and others like him was untold. He told it to those within the family, or to his friends, in fragments and snippets. Some of those stories involved interactions and relationships between Chinese and Aboriginal people. There was a world only glimpsed by the rest of us, a world in which the railroad that my great-grandfather and his relatives helped build ran through Indigenous communities all the way up the Fraser Canyon. And even as the Chinese finished laying the tracks in 1885 and were immediately asked to pay an onerous Head Tax in order to keep coming, they kept coming. They kept coming by the boatload in the tens of thousands year after year, working in mines, and in logging camps, and in canneries, and in grocery stores, and the farms that grew the produce for those stores, and as cooks and laundry men, and café and store owners in every small town in BC and across the Prairies all the way to Halifax.

Even as those migrants whose families had come from Europe rode the train westwards and arrived to see Aboriginal people and Chinese everywhere already, those young Chinese men like my great-grandfather walked and rode the train in the other direction, often marrying into local Aboriginal

communities and creating a very different world than the one I had learned about in textbooks about “westward” expansion and settlement. When that mixed and unique world was steadily eroded and ended by the ethnic cleansing of Aboriginal people through reserves and residential schooling, and by anti-Asian immigration legislation and exclusion, the traces of memory remained within many Aboriginal communities of Chinese men who were fathers and grandfathers, and kindly local restaurant and store owners in small towns who welcomed rather than turned away all customers no matter their race. But they are only glimpses and fragments, traces of a real, lived history targeted for eradication and erased from a collective memory framed narrowly as a white settler history of the Canadian nation. We supposedly have two “Founding People” of Canada—the English and the French. But when the Canadian Confederation was invented, there were many other people already here, and the colony of British Columbia was just as much in existence as what would become Ontario and Quebec. And the presence already of Chinese, as well as Native Hawaiians and other Pacific migrants in BC, along with the complex Indigenous societies along the coast and in the interior, could not simply be erased. Stories long ignored or forgotten can be told and retold, filling the silences created by erasure.

During the opening launch reception for the Dialogues Project, a short snippet of a documentary made by the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia (CCHSBC), entitled *Cedar and Bamboo*, was shown. The film, produced by CCHSBC board member Jennifer Lau and past board member Karin Lee, and directed by Diana Leung and Kamala Todd (who is also one of the City of Vancouver’s Dialogues Circle Project Team), focused on the stories of four people of mixed Chinese–Aboriginal ancestry. The filmmakers had a powerful vision of the impact that recovering these forgotten and ignored histories could make. By providing a historical context for considering the long history of engagements between Aboriginal people and immigrants who were otherwise unwelcome, the film created an important moment of mutual recognition through a shared past. Musqueam Councillor Grant, one of the three aforementioned co-chairs for the project, spoke movingly about growing up aware of his own mixed ancestry and of his pride of seeing the story of his own father, Howard Grant, featured in the film. The family history of the Grants perhaps exemplified the promise of opening up a dialogue about histories still too uncommonly told, and the challenge of what kind of shared future still awaits us.

So much of our common past is left out of what is supposed to be our common history, so that we are left with an array of uncommon stories that do not add up. One of the triumphs of a white supremacist colonial history

of Canada was the mythical alchemy that made it possible for everyone who arrived from Europe to become a “Canadian,” and for all those who were non-white to remain a “visible minority,” forever arriving late, or a “native” forever destined to disappear. During the early twentieth century, when anti-Asian politics ruled British Columbia, the slogan used was “White Canada Forever,” a phrase that meant those who were considered “white” owned not only the future, but also the past. The moment a migrant stepped off the boat in Halifax from Glasgow, even before he climbed aboard the train that might take him all the way to Vancouver, he was already a “Canadian.” His “accent” would not undermine his claims to belong in the way that speaking English with an “Oriental” accent would, and still does. Despite the fact that migrants from across the Pacific arrived at the same time on Coast Salish land as those migrants from across the Atlantic, white supremacy built a sense of belonging around “whiteness.” Non-English-speaking “white” migrants could gain the status of full belonging in Canada by speaking English and converting themselves to Anglophone dominance. Those who were considered non-white were not accorded the same privileges and possibilities.

Say the word “immigrant” and who do you imagine? To those Aboriginal people whose ancestors welcomed the first trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific migrants to these shores, everyone else is a migrant to their homeland. If we are to all make a home together here, there can be no reconciliation with the inequities of our past until this simple truth is recognized. But the demographic reality of our present and future must also be taken into account. There is a “New Canada”² being made in the last four decades since immigration reform removed racial barriers to non-white migration. The top 10 places of birth for immigrants who arrived in Canada between 2001 and 2006 included only two European countries. The United Kingdom, which was the dominant No.1 sending nation for the first century of Canadian history, was on the list at No. 9, sending just over 25,000 new immigrants. In contrast, six of the top 10 countries were in Asia, and the top four on the list alone—the People’s Republic of China, India, the Philippines, and Pakistan—accounted for two-thirds of all new migrants to Canada in that period, with the People’s Republic of China sending over 155,000, India over 129,000, the Philippines over 77,000, and Pakistan over 57,000.³

In 2006, 83.9 per cent of all new immigrants to Canada came from regions outside of Europe, and the very moniker “visible minority” to designate “non-white” Canadians had become a questionable description, in particular to describe Canada’s urban populations. Over 96 per cent of Canada’s “visible minorities” live in metropolitan regions. Two main groups—South

Asians and self-identified ethnic Chinese—accounted for half of all visible minorities in Canada,⁴ with each accounting for roughly one-quarter of the total. Other migrants from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia are remaking our society. Ethnic Chinese and South Asians account for 8 per cent of Canada’s total population, and because they have settled overwhelmingly in either the metropolitan regions of Toronto or Vancouver, they have transformed those cities. Between 1980 and 2001, for instance, the largest proportion of new migrants to Canada were ethnic Chinese who came from various locations in Southeast Asia (including Hong Kong), along with migrants born in the People’s Republic of China. These various ethnic Chinese migrants went overwhelmingly (87%) to the five largest cities in Canada, with 41 per cent going to Toronto and 31 per cent to Vancouver alone.⁵

What is clear is that trans-Pacific migration from Asia, as well as “visible minority” migrants in general from outside Europe, has transformed Canada in the last 25 years. Vancouver in particular has become a city in which the term “visible minority” makes no sense. In 2006, four out of 10 Vancouverites had been born outside of Canada, and five out of 10 were of Asian ancestry. Richmond and Burnaby, suburbs of metropolitan Vancouver, were comprised of 65 per cent and 55 per cent visible minorities, respectively, and 50 per cent of Richmond’s population is ethnic Chinese; in Vancouver, Canada’s third largest city, the “visible minority” is “white.”

If the “New Canada” can be understood by looking at the changed face of Vancouver in the present, so too can the future be seen in the largely non-white faces of our youth. Visible minorities in Canada are literally the face of tomorrow—their median age in 2006 was 33 versus an average age of 39 for the population as a whole. The fast growing non-white population of our younger generations also includes First Nations and Aboriginal youth, who represent one of the fastest-growing segments of Canada’s young. The future of Canada can be seen in our changing demographics, but are we ready to meet the challenges of this new world?

The Dialogues Project was meant to engage in a sharing of our pasts—who we are and where we are from—but also to create a shared understanding about who we aspire to be in the future. Nine locations were chosen as sites for dialogue, with a mix of participants selected from volunteers and those identified and invited by the Steering Committee as having valuable insights to contribute to the conversations. We strove to include both Elders and youth of Aboriginal and immigrant backgrounds in as many of the groups as possible, recognizing that wisdom and life experience blended with the fresh curiosity of the young was an important element of bridging

many of the generational gaps that exist in both Aboriginal and immigrant communities. Each of the groups met three times and was guided in its discussions by one of a set of trained facilitators, led by Eric Wong, and a group of volunteer youth leaders played a prominent role with the intention of having them also lead an outreach process to broaden the process to other youth. A closing dialogue circle involving all of the groups together was held at the Vancouver Public Library, with the Mayor of Vancouver, Gregor Robertson, and several city councillors in attendance, as well as Her Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, the former Governor General of Canada, and her husband John Saul who had taken a keen interest in the Dialogues Project, with the intention of exploring how similar dialogues might take place in other sites across Canada.

After the dialogue circles ended, a series of site visits were organized. The Steering Committee believed that these were crucial for creating a sense of familiarity and welcome among the participants. Urban environments so easily become segregated spaces, and like welcoming a neighbor into one's own home, a mutual process of visitation and hospitality was seen as an organic outgrowth of the sharing of stories within the dialogue circles. At the conclusion of the Dialogues Project, some of the most interesting insights and moments will be made available in both a written and video form. Although all conversations from the circles themselves were private and kept anonymous in order to create and maintain a safe and secure atmosphere for dialogue, follow-up interviews and a summation of many of the issues brought up during the dialogues will become a valuable document that we hope will become the basis for further discussion and educational outreach, in particular, for addressing the dearth of information about First Nations and Aboriginal issues and history currently provided to new immigrants to Canada.

Even as we break the silences and speak the truth about many of the terrible things that have been done in our past, we are left with the task of trying to understand what we have in common, what we can take from our broken past, upon which we can build a shared future. Do we need a shared past in order to have a common future? I became a historian in a quest to answer this basic question, and the Dialogues Project for me is an important part of a collective, collaborative project for those sets of people whose stories have often been silenced or ignored, so that they could speak and hear each other's stories. We hoped that each of us in listening would be able to know ourselves and each other a bit better, and to generate a dialogue that created a mutual understanding of our differences as well as what we shared in common.

We remain so far away from creating together a new shared future. The settlement of land claims and treaty negotiations, and a much-needed reconciliation process, will be long and hard. But perhaps through one story at a time about who we are and where we are from, we can begin to build in a collaborative manner a new shared history, one that recognizes the painful aspects of our past, and perhaps even provides a common understanding of who we are and where we are.

Notes

- 1 The Steering Committee's first task was to help advise social planner Baldwin Wong on the City of Vancouver's application for a grant from British Columbia's Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program (WICWP), which receives most of its funding from the federal government under the *Canada-British Columbia Immigration Agreement* (retrieved from: http://www.welcomebc.ca/wbc/service_providers/programs/welcome_program/index.page). The Dialogues Project homepage and a documentation of the process can be found at: <http://vancouver.ca/commssvcs/socialplanning/dialoguesproject/index.htm>
- 2 The information here has been adapted and/or excerpted, including statistical data, from my 2009 article: Yu, H. (2009:1012-1013). Global migrants and the new Pacific Canada. *International Journal* 65(4):1011-1026.
- 3 Statistics Canada, Geography Division (2007). World: Place of Birth of New Immigrants to Canada, 2006. In *2006 Census of Canada*. Romania at No. 7 was the origin of just over 28,000 immigrants. Also see: Immigration to Canada from the Asia Pacific, 1961-1996. In *Population & Immigration Statistical Report*. Vancouver, BC: Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. (Original source: 1996 Census).
- 4 Chui, T., K. Tran, and H. Maheux (2007). *Immigration in Canada: A Portrait of the Foreign-born Population, 2006 Census*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.
- 5 Chinese Canada is not homogeneous, with a great variety of linguistic and social variation reflecting varied origins not only in Asia, but from around the globe. The same can be said of South Asians, who, like ethnic Chinese, often come to Canada as part of global diasporas that emanated from home villages decades and even centuries earlier, bringing with them to Canada a wide array of family journeys and complicated histories from around the world and over many generations. By 2006, South Asians had slightly surpassed ethnic Chinese as the largest group of "visible minorities" in Canada, but both are categories that envelop a complex spectrum of family and personal histories that cannot be reduced to simple ethno-cultural or racial categorizations. See: Guo, Shibao and Don Devoretz (2005, February). The Changing Faces of Chinese Immigrants. In *Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis*, No. 05-08. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Centre of Excellence.

A Provocation Anti-Asian Exclusion and the Making and Unmaking of White Supremacy in Canada

HENR Y YU

On September 7, 2007, the federal government building at 401 Burrard Street, in downtown Vancouver, was quietly renamed in honour of Douglas Jung. As far as anyone could remember, it was the first time that a Chinese Canadian had been honoured through the naming of a building, park, or other permanent infrastructure by the federal government. The ceremony was relatively small and restrained, despite what many commentators considered its historic significance. Douglas Jung had been the first Chinese Canadian member of Parliament, elected in 1957, a signature achievement since Chinese Canadians had been stripped of the franchise almost immediately after Confederation. Chinese Canadians had only regained the right to vote and to run for office in 1947, ten years before Jung's historic election as a Conservative MP. The restraint shown in the renaming ceremony was certainly due to the building having been named for another Conservative MP, Howard Green, less than a year earlier. The choice of Green, a proponent of nuclear nonproliferation and active in the peace movement at the end of his political career, had been controversial because of his earlier role calling for the removal and exile of Japanese Canadians from Canada's West Coast. The Human Rights Committee of the Japanese Canadian Citizens Association led a popular campaign criticizing the choice of Green, pointing out that he had been one of the most prominent and vehement voices of racism against allowing Japanese Canadians to return to their

homes after the Second World War ended in 1945. They were legally prevented from returning for three years and seven months more, until April 1, 1949 – a period longer than their exile of three years and five months during the war.

The most striking voice in the campaign against Green was a retired Tsawwassen schoolteacher named Keiko Mary Kitagawa, whose family had been removed from their home on Salt Spring Island during the Second World War. The naming “triggered something deep in my memory,” and although Kitagawa had spent her life moving on from what had happened to her and her family, a friend’s quick check of old newspapers at the Vancouver Public Library reminded her of Green’s racial vitriol against “Japs,” both in justifying their initial removal and in prolonging their exile.¹ Why, she asked in a letter to minister of public works Michael Fortier, after the Conservative Party and then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney had led the Parliament of Canada in a formal apology and redress to Japanese Canadians in 1988, were they honouring a man who had so prominently and vehemently led the movement which they had acknowledged was wrong?²

After a year of controversy and a hearing at which arguments for both retaining and changing the name of the building were heard, the resultant choice to honour Douglas Jung – whose career so aptly represented a personal triumph over anti-Asian racism – seemed an elegant solution. Both Green and Jung had been members of the government during John Diefenbaker’s tenure as prime minister. Similar to Green, who had served as an officer in the First World War and then attended law school, Jung had served in the Canadian military during the Second World War and then attended law school, with support from his veteran’s benefits. The choice of Jung over Green appeared to be a slight – albeit telling – variation in the meaning of the historical past for Canada. Contained within the difference was recognition that Canada had been transformed from a society that explicitly and overtly used anti-Asian legislation and racial inequality as building blocks for the foundation of the nation, toward one that repudiated such tools.

Newspaper stories recognized the quiet triumph signalled by the name change, in particular because the announcement, on September 7, 2007, took place on the same day as an eight hundred-guest reconciliation dinner marking the hundredth anniversary of the 1907 anti-Asian riots in Vancouver.³ The dinner was the culmination of six months of city-wide public events (including a large-scale symbolic Riot Walk along the original

route of the rioters) that focused on the Anniversaries of Change, which marked the transformation of Canada from the society built on the white supremacy displayed in the 1907 riots.⁴ These anniversaries included the sixtieth anniversary of the 1947 Citizenship Act that granted the franchise to nonwhites and the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 immigration reforms that removed racial preferences from immigration policy. The anniversary events included organizations and leaders from the Japanese Canadian, Chinese Canadian, Indo-Canadian, First Nations, and urban indigenous communities, as well as the Vancouver District Labour Council (VDLC) representing all of the major unions in Vancouver. The VDLC was the contemporary version of the original umbrella organization within the labour movement that had been one of the main organizers of the 1907 riot. Anniversaries of Change provided a powerful symbolic context in Vancouver for the renaming of the federal building for Jung.

But was the renaming a quiet triumph over Canada's racist past? Was it a coda in what Patricia Roy so evocatively described as the "Triumph of Citizenship"?⁵ Roy's storyline, substantively documented, is compelling – anti-Asian politics marked the first century of provincial history in BC and shaped the politics of Canadian citizenship, first as a racially exclusionary process and then as one that recognized those who had been previously excluded. The story of Canada, in a sense, and its triumph, is that at one time we were racist, but we are no longer.

Reactions to the renaming varied. Green's son strenuously objected, saying, "My father was not a racist," and that the attack on his father's name was based on an "incorrect and unjustified slur."⁶ He echoed justifications made in 1942, that removing Japanese Canadians from British Columbia was based "on concerns for Canada's security at a time of war."

On the Canadian Army website discussion board, some veterans also debated the merits of the renaming, continuing the discussion for years. One poster, "54/102 CEF," wrote in early 2009:

The big hit on Green is he is identified as a poster boy for Country Wide Anti Japanese Sentiment on the West Coast that was accepted wisdom of the day ... The anti-Japanese era was a regrettable era, and the modern day efforts to 'get even for the past' is just as regrettable. Mulroney cleared the slate. Probably the better route is to name the building for a local hero with links to Asia. Has the bldg been renamed? Anyone? Times have changed and we have to change with them.⁷

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54/102 CEF's assertions captured the understanding of many that parallels Roy's story of the rise and eventual fall of racism and white supremacy in Canada. And suggesting that the building be named for a local hero with links to Asia was retroactively prescient (the renaming had actually taken place over a year earlier). Jung was just such a hero, as the renaming committee clearly realized.

How history – and Canadian historians – should understand the actions of someone like Green is the question that animates this chapter. More generally, how should we understand race and racism in Canada's historical past? The renaming of the Howard Green building is a useful starting point for approaching this question: Are we judging the past actions of people through an inappropriate and anachronistic moral lens if we now repudiate the anti-Asian racism they expressed?

Around the time that 54/102 CEF was debating other Army veterans about Green's merits, an essay appeared in the *Journal of British Columbia Studies* arguing that although "repugnant by today's standards, Green's comments were not exceptional for the time."⁸ Placing them within their historical period in which they occurred led to a more nuanced understanding of Green's actions:

Should Green's conduct regarding Japanese Canadians have led to the public shaming caused by the erasure of his name from the building at 401 Burrard Street? Historians argue that individuals need to be judged within the context of their time. Today, race is understood as a social construct and as an unjust motivator for action. This was not always so. Green's critics focus on his actions prior to 1946, when, by today's standards, his beliefs were indeed most reprehensible. Yet, this was also the period in which they were the most widely accepted.⁹

Is an historicism that interprets "racism" in the past through a lens that disallows moral judgment, because the current morality on racism was not the standard seventy years ago, the proper approach? Is racism an issue of morality that can only be adjudged through a retroactive democratic process; in other words, if many people believed in racism seventy years ago, then it was acceptable, and if many people do not believe in racism now, it is not acceptable? One analytical consequence of such an argument is that race becomes primarily a matter of morality, so that historical analyses become distorted with a laudable but misplaced attempt to avoid moral judgment. Racism becomes merely a moral value that we now reject, but by which we

cannot judge those in the past. This claim, that the moral standards in one historical period cannot be used to judge the actions of those in another, is a common misapplication of historicism. Although a useful (albeit misguided) heuristic device for teaching students, it is not a useful analysis for understanding race and historical change in Canada.

Indeed, this misapprehension about the equivalency of racism and morality is precisely one of the historical consequences of using anti-Asian political rhetoric and white supremacy as a strategy in Canada for creating political coalitions. Fomenting and agitating against Asians was a political process – one that created a false equivalence between morality and the acceptability of holding racist beliefs by a majority of voters – and was thus democratic and morally sound. Only by actively disenfranchising nonwhites (as accomplished by laws enacted immediately after Confederation in the 1870s, which took the vote away from Chinese, “Natives,” and other nonwhites) could the illusion be sustained that racism was a product of a democratic majority – and was thus morally agreeable. The number of nonwhites in British Columbia had always been large enough, for instance, that if allowed to vote, they would have immediately enfranchised enough voters to end this racially engineered body politic, which girded the ongoing delusion of white supremacy that was supported democratically (and thus morally) by a majority. In the first past the post system of voting used in most municipal, provincial, and federal ridings in Canada, a small shift in a block of voters (just enough to cover the difference between the winner and the next candidate) is enough to change the result in a close election. This is one reason why minorities in a riding can make a difference in a close election. Disenfranchising nonwhites also disempowered them from affecting close elections, girding the remaining “white majority” that could be built around white supremacy. Newly arrived Europeans who may never have thought about being white until arriving in Canada could be convinced that their new privileges as majority Canadians were worth the exclusion of others.

This toxic equation of racism, morality, and democracy – invented by white supremacist politics in the late nineteenth century – continues to infect historical narratives of Canada. It is a political process of disempowerment and empowerment that was fundamentally different from how white women and non-property owning whites eventually achieved the franchise. As in the United States and Britain, the expansion of the right to vote to women and non-property owners had not been predicated upon a process of disenfranchisement. The extension of voting rights to white women added to the electorate without subtracting voters, unlike the process in

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British Columbia after Confederation, when Chinese and Indians were disenfranchised in 1874, Japanese in 1895, and Hindus in 1907. Chinese men had voted in municipal elections before being disenfranchised. When the franchise was extended to women in 1917, it did not overturn the racial disenfranchisement of Chinese Canadians, Japanese Canadians, South Asian Canadians, or Indigenous peoples, so women classified as Asian and Indigenous still could not vote.

It is commonplace for histories of Canada to celebrate the expansion of democracy to women, as if all women received the vote in 1917, and to non-propertied men, as if all nonpropertied men received the vote. But, as in the United States, the expansion of voting rights required a careful consideration of who would continue to not enjoy the franchise. Although a limited number of nonwhite Canadians were given the franchise (for instance formerly enslaved African Canadians who were able to flee to Nova Scotia, Ontario and other eastern provinces after the American Revolution and before the American Civil War, or Japanese Canadian veterans who fought for Canada during the First World War), the classification of nonwhites in general as outside the belonging of Canada as a nation was an integral element of the normative equation of whiteness and white supremacy with citizenry. The long history of defining Asians as perpetual aliens in British Columbia shaped the legal categories of citizenship and cultural categories of national belonging and unbelonging in Canada, just as ongoing exclusions of Indigenous peoples across Canada did.

Who is Canada now and who were Canadians then? We continue to narrate and propagate a conceptual slip that reinforces the exclusions that took place through the gerrymandered democracy of white supremacy. For British Columbia to have a seemingly democratic majority that supported white supremacy, First Nations and Chinese peoples, who lived in large numbers around British Columbia in the 1870s, needed to be both disenfranchised and cleared from the best land and jobs. By the time of the removal of Japanese Canadians from British Columbia in 1942, the question of who was Canadian was based on a racially engineered notion of a moral majority in a white supremacist democracy –the majority was made up of whites who could vote. They did not have to take into account others' perspectives because the others had no vote, therefore, no voice. That was the singular accomplishment of the mass politics (and self-serving historical narrative) of white supremacy, and we continue to naturalize its effects in our history, not only by accepting its basic premises about who was Canadian



(and who was not), but also by accepting that such exclusions were moral at the time because the beliefs were held by a democratic majority.

These misapprehensions about racism as a matter of morality and belief continue to haunt historiography in Canada because of the process by which antiracism as a political cause was also propagated as a matter of democratic majority belief. By the late twentieth century, the politics of white supremacy were eclipsed by the politics of antiracism. Often tied to social psychology theories about racism that focused on causal racial attitudes, antiracism, as both a moral and political process, was a matter of changing the beliefs of individual whites, so that a new democratic majority based on racial tolerance and acceptance could be created. The triumph of a democratic political process was accomplished by allowing nonwhites to become citizens and therefore able to vote against the white supremacist laws that had denigrated and excluded them.

However, rather than analyze race in Canadian history only through the lens of morality and the right or not to judge the beliefs of majorities created through disenfranchisement, it would be more useful to return race to history, in other words to embed it into the political processes of history. Colonization, settlement, and the creation of national polities based upon white supremacy were parallel and linked processes that helped found the settler societies of Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. The political work accomplished through white supremacy, in other words, can be analyzed in a comparative and connective context with other settler societies, each of which moved from colonial status to nationhood. Each used and shared the tools of white supremacy to build independent nationalist imaginaries. We can perform this analysis without resorting to questions of moral judgment or to simplified debates about the heuristic value of historicism.

Each of the former colonies used disenfranchisement of nonwhites to achieve the delusion of democratic majorities and belief in the morality of white supremacy. They created processes both in formal politics, through elections that excluded nonwhites, and in narratives, through equating national belonging with being white. Democracy, as well as commonsensical notions of what was widely accepted, could then be conceptually grounded on a limited set of white citizens, and nonwhites could be ignored, as if they did not exist or were merely a negligible minority. The idea that nonwhites did not matter has been one of the most successful delusions accomplished by the narrative and legal violence of white supremacy. By limiting

our analyses to the moral mechanisms of white supremacy, we lose sight of the fact that racial hierarchy is not just a set of beliefs, but also a set of legal, economic, and social arrangements that took a great deal of political work to both make and unmake. We misapprehend morality for politics. It took a great deal of work to deprive people of resources and dignity, especially if they were intelligent and self-respecting, and if they were, at the same time, working hard, formally and informally, to circumvent the mechanisms of racial hierarchy.

The narrative violence of telling stories about Canadian belonging that replicate the political accomplishments of white supremacy is one of the most significant legacies of the politics of racialization. It is also challenging for historians (both amateur and scholarly) to understand how this narrative violence continues to work. To preclude from conceptual consideration whole groups of people who were a continual and significant presence in Canada long before Confederation, and to tell stories about the past as if they did not exist or were merely passive victims of racism – that is a triumph indeed of the violence that distorted storytelling perpetuates.

The most important analytic consequence of thinking about the effects of race, or, more accurately, white supremacy, in Canadian history, is the realization that the conceptual question of who was a Canadian was the result of a political process built around racial categories and white supremacy. Using a different concept of who is a part of Canada's history, repudiating the limited category put forth by white supremacists at the time – even if they were politically successful in building the formal mechanisms of law and citizenship around white supremacy – is a crucial and fundamental step.

Limiting our analytical purview to the formal political processes invented at the time, in other words, replicates the limits and constraints built into political projects of racialization.¹⁰ To not apply our current understanding of broader social and political processes, in other words, is to read back into the past inappropriate analytical standards by accepting, de facto, the inadequate categories of the past. To assert that most Canadians were racist at the time, and, therefore, we are somehow judging them when we apply current standards of morality is to put blinders on and see only the triumphant accomplishments of white supremacy. As Tim Stanley and John Price each eloquently argue in *Contesting White Supremacy* and *Orienting Canada*, respectively, many people, both white and nonwhite, did not agree with white supremacy, not least the Chinese Canadians, Japanese Canadians, Indo-Canadians, and other Asian Canadians who knew exactly what was going

on, because they did not have the privilege of blissfully ignoring the ways in which white supremacy redistributed the resources in Canadian society. We evade history when we understand racism as merely the context of the times. Rather, we need to understand how peoples excluded from the privileges of white supremacy continued to live and struggle (despite being erased from the narrative of Canada) and often created clever ways to circumvent the formal and informal processes of white supremacy.

There are two historical transformations: (1) the gradual shift in the privileged thinking of Canadians who understood themselves immediately as Canadian just because they were white (for example, white women of European ancestry who, before 1917, could not vote, could still imagine themselves as Canadian); and (2) the transformations wrought by those who had to struggle every day of their lives in Canada against the constraints of white supremacy, and who also in remarkable ways remade the country. Some of them, in enduring and persevering through the pervasive effects of racism in their everyday lives, countered its effects through the humanity of their forbearance. This second transformation merits more attention. By the early twentieth century, some of those who struggled had been taught in churches and schools to believe that they were also “Canadian” (if only in their minds). Shaped by an upbringing and education in Canada that preached the ideals of fair play and justice, even if such ideals did not apply in practice to them, many Asian Canadians through everyday experience could calculate with precision the hypocrisy and delusions of white supremacy. But still to this day, we do not calculate their numbers or evaluate their presence when we adjudge what was accepted wisdom. How are we to write the history of the past without replicating the exclusions of the past? How do we narrate the national story without reinforcing the delusions of race within the larger story of Canada?

There continues to be a tension between two versions of Canada. One version is defined by narratives of history shaped by white supremacy, the other version is still incompletely narrated but shaped by Asian Canadians and others considered nonwhite, such as Indigenous peoples, who lived in the same society but were generally excluded both from formal politics and historical narrations. Despite these exclusions, however, they were often causal agents in transforming society through their reactions against and overcoming of exclusion. That process took place not only in Canada, but also in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, because each built white supremacy in concert with the others. What remains uneven

in Canada – in comparison to the other three settler colonies-turned-independent-nations – is how historians narrate the (still incomplete) dismantling of white supremacy. In Canada, antiracism as a political process has focused on changing the attitudes and beliefs of whites, thereby creating a new moral majority who should not believe in racism. This has had a narrative consequence. Without a broader awareness of stories about those who quietly pushed for the end of white supremacy, rather than just about those moral white Canadians who believed in antiracism, we are left with a narrative vacuum that presumes the gradual transformation in attitude of Canadians was a matter of generous good grace bequeathed upon those who were formerly left out. Seldom still are told the stories of those who struggled against exclusion. Yet, they were the agents who actually forced the changes that led to the dismantling of white supremacy.¹¹

What would it look like to narrate the story of these transformations, in which they are activated by those who pushed for change, rather than continuing to tell the story as internal change by those who already enjoyed the privileges of being counted as Canadian? As Roy's work details, even at the height of anti-Asian political agitation, there were, among those who enjoyed the privilege of being treated as "white" Canadians, opponents to the usage of anti-Asian political tools. Even as union organizers in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the western United States built labour movements defined by anti-Asian exclusion and white supremacy, many within their ranks believed that exacerbating racial hierarchies among workers, rather than uniting them, was a mistake. But more important for understanding the frictions encountered in the implementation of white supremacy were the array of opponents targeted by racism. Even though disenfranchising them reduced their effectiveness in the arenas of formal politics and law courts, they nevertheless should be considered as political opponents of white supremacy who used alternative, often informal, means to struggle against the social and economic constraints produced by racial hierarchies.

Even cultural practices such as sports – and other competitions in which "nonwhites" could "level the playing field" by forcing "white" Canadians to play by the same set of rules – were symbolically and affectively important (even if limited) means of fighting back. The Chinese Canadian soccer team from the 1910s to 1930s and the Japanese Canadian Asahi Tigers baseball team from the 1920s to 1930s – which won multiple championships in Vancouver in fair head-to-head competitions – were fêted by their communities because of the symbolic and affective meanings of their victories. In a world where Asian Canadians were denied access to, and participation

in, the political arena, triumph and belonging in the athletic arena was a not so subtle expletive to the proponents of white supremacy. How such moments of triumph inspired other forms of perseverance, resistance and endurance cannot be underestimated. Taking serious account of the affective politics of such informal struggles is a crucial tool for analyzing the political work of Asian Canadians and others disenfranchised and excluded from formal democratic politics.

Asian Canadians are misapprehended as silent victims of racism or as politically powerless because they were disenfranchised. Historical accounts that continue to narrate historical change without accounting for the agency of those who were racially excluded reinforce the narrative exclusions of white supremacy by adopting an analytical framework that ignores the primary agency of the excluded in fighting against their exclusion. By necessity, because they were not allowed in the legislature, courtrooms, and other formal bodies that made or implemented law, Asian Canadians operated informally, outside of institutions, thus leaving fewer archival traces, because quiet, informal meetings and unannounced agreements were the norm. As Lisa Mar details in *Brokering Belonging* (2010), middlemen served a crucial function as brokers, for example. During the 1960s and 1970s, a community-based fight led by Chinese Canadian women against city planners' attempts to raze Chinatown and the neighbouring Strathcona communities used dinner banquets as an effective political organizing tool.¹² Other examples abound of the roles that community leaders, local organizers, and informal go-betweens played in creating political change, as scholars such as Lisa Mar, Timothy Stanley, John Price, Stephanie Bangarth, Jo-Anne Lee, Roy Miki, Audrey Kobayashi, Sadhu Binning, David Sangha, and community activists such as Hayne Wai, Stan Fukawa, Masako Fukawa, and many others have detailed.

The process of migration was itself another effective tactic for evading the uneven application of anti-Asian laws and the uneven terrain of white supremacy by geographic region. By navigating the administrative practices that varied across both space and across time periods, and by astutely reading the exigencies and contingent variations between particular local communities, a migrant could take advantage of a single well-placed ally in one location or avoid a group of vehement racists in another. By focusing only on single geographic locations across time, instead of following migrants on their peripatetic journeys, we lose an analytical appreciation for the strategies and tactics that migrants wove through a network of locations across and around Canada and the Pacific.

The inclusion of Asian Canadian history in Canadian history is not a matter of adding yet another community history to an array of multicultural histories. The history of Canadian immigration has never been persuasively displayed as a pantheon of ethnic communities whose various histories are considered of equal importance – British and French migrations have always taken precedence, and all other migrations pale in comparison. Indeed, the definitions of ethnic and immigrant result directly from this focus on the historical importance of Anglo-French migrations. In contrast, this provocation has argued that anti-Asian exclusion (along with the colonial dispossession and dislocation of Indigenous peoples) has been crucial to the politics of white supremacy, which was a fundamental element in the process of nation building for the settler nation of Canada, as it also was in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. I hope that the majority of historians in Canada will someday analytically see through the conceptual borders created by focusing only on the Canada defined by exclusion itself. Rather, we should see Canada as the complex society that actually existed, and which can be recognized only through the struggle of those who fought back against exclusion. In this light, the retelling of history is not a moral question; it is an issue of analytical rigour: we have yet to end the narrative violence of racial exclusion. At present, we have only incompletely repudiated the politics of white supremacy and its legacies.

NOTES

- 1 N.M. Ibuki, "The Indomitable Spirit of Keiko Mary Kitagawa, Part 2," *Discover Nikkei*, July 31, 2014, <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2014/7/31/indomitable-spirit-mary-kitagawa-2/>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 "Green edifice to honour Douglas Jung," *Province (British Columbia)*, September 7, 2007.
- 4 Anniversaries Network, *Change in Action*, Brochure, 2008, http://www.history.ubc.ca/documents/faculty/yu/AofC_brochure_08_lores.pdf.
- 5 P. Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941–1967* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).
- 6 "Green edifice to honour Douglas Jung," *Province*.
- 7 54/102 CEF, "WWI Veteran's Legacy Not Good Enough for Old Enemies," message posted to Army.ca Forums, January 14, 2009, reply no. 7, <http://army.ca/forums/index.php/topic,82954.0/nowap.html?PHPSESSID=7tl2crmn581csout4dmsmqncq4>.
- 8 D. Heidt, "Howard Charles Green and Japanese Canadians," *BC Studies* 164 (2009/10): 36.
- 9 Ibid., 50.

- 10 For a now classic sociological interpretation of race and racism, originally published in 1986, that moves beyond the conception of race as attitudes or beliefs, see M. Omi and H. Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s–1990s*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 1994).
- 11 For three recent monographs that embed historical changes about anti-Asian politics within a world of political contest that include Asian Canadians, rather than portray a world of politics in which they are largely absent, see L.R. Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); J. Price, *Orienting Canada: Race, Empire, and the Transpacific* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012); and T. Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).
- 12 J. Lee, "Gender, Ethnicity, and Hybrid Forms of Community-Based Urban Activism in Vancouver, 1957–1978: The Strathcona Story Revisited," *Gender, Place and Culture* 14, 4 (2007): 381–408; H. Wai, "Vancouver Chinatown 1960–1980: A Community Perspective," *New Scholars, New Visions in Canadian Studies* vol. 3, 1 (Jackson School of Politics, University of Washington: 1998).