

THE ASAHI BASEBALL TEAM REMEMBERED

Introduction

Focus

The Asahi Baseball Club, a group of Japanese Canadian baseball players who were interned during the Second World War, is remembered today for victories on the baseball diamond in the face of discrimination and racist attitudes. This *News in Review* report examines the treatment of Japanese Canadians leading up to 1939, their internment during the Second World War, and the actions of the Canadian government concerning this community in the years since the war.

 Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

The Asahi

Asahi in Japanese means “morning sun.” Five young Japanese men, four Issei and one Nisei, formed the first Asahi baseball team in Vancouver, B.C., in 1914. The Nisei loved the game because it was such a big part of North American culture and it was affordable for working-class families. Some parents had even played the game in Japan. Young players formed teams under the Asahi organization. The youngest team was called the Clovers, the next team was the Beavers, and the oldest and most advanced team was known as the Athletics. The Asahi Club drew their players mostly from Little Tokyo in Vancouver, and played at Athletic Park and Powell Grounds. In general the Asahi were not power-houses or heavy hitters, but they were heroes to the Japanese Canadian community. They dominated senior baseball in the 1930s and 1940s by playing what became known as “brainball” because they relied on bunts, stolen bases, speed and precision fielding. The championship-winning Asahi Baseball Club was popular with both Japanese Canadians and non-Japanese Canadians. During a time when Japanese Canadians were frequently targets of racism—not being allowed to vote, to teach, nor to work in the civil service or other professions—the barriers of race came down when the ball was in play. These players taught their fans baseball strategy as well as the true meaning of fair play and sportsmanship. The Asahi remain a symbol of pride not only for Canada’s Japanese Canadian community but also fans of baseball everywhere.

Internment

In September 1939 the Second World War erupted. Canada declared war on Germany. The Asahi continued to play baseball and, for five consecutive years, defeated their competitors and won the prized Northwest Pacific Championship. When Japan entered the war in 1941 there was no warning that the Canadian government would soon announce that all Japanese Canadians were “enemy aliens” in their own country. Yet early in 1942, just after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in December 1941, 22 000 Japanese Canadians were relocated to internment and labour camps. The Asahi Baseball Club was disbanded and never played together again.

The Canadian government announced that Japanese Canadians posed a threat to the country’s national security because Canada was at war with Japan. Although there was no actual proof of these allegations at the time, Japanese Canadians were given 24 to 48 hours notice of relocation. They gathered as many of their most beloved possessions as they could carry with them and said goodbye to family members and friends.

The Japanese Canadians lost everything. Their homes, businesses, and property were sold, and they received little or no money for what they had owned. Their savings were taken, often used to pay for their travel to the internment camps, as well as paying for the day-to-day running of the camps. Their Canadian citizenship was revoked and families were separated. The camps were crowded, ill-equipped, dirty, and

Definitions

Issei, Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei: Japanese language terms used to describe first-, second-, third-, and fourth-generation settlement in Canada. *Nikkei* means ethnically Japanese. *Nikkei Kanadajin* means Canadians of Japanese ethnicity. This term is important because it separates ethnicity from citizenship and self-identification.

Further Research

An excellent audio-visual summary of the Japanese Canadian experience can be found by visiting the CBC Digital Archives at www.cbc.ca/archives and going to the topic "Relocation to Redress: The Internment of the Japanese Canadians."

secured by barbed-wire fences and guards. The Japanese Canadians often lived in tents and huts without heat or water.

Little by little, once some of the former Asahis overcame the shock of being interned, bats and balls appeared in the camps. Teams were formed and internees gathered around at game time to watch their favourite players. These games served as a distraction from the depressing reality of the camps and as a source of pride for the internees. It was one way of fighting back.

Once the war was over Japanese Canadians were pressured to move to Japan, a place many had never seen before, or move to unfamiliar provinces east of the Rockies. Most stayed in Canada and patiently rebuilt their lives and communities. Finally, in 1988, the Canadian government made a public apology for its mistreatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. In June 2003 the Asahi Baseball Club was inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

To Consider

1. Why might "barriers of race come down" during a baseball game?

2. What sports do you play where race or ethnicity is not an issue?

3. What is your opinion about the Japanese Internment in 1942?

4. What lessons might be learned from the story of the Asahi Baseball Club?

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Video Review

Answer the questions on this and the following page during the video. The discussion questions should be attempted after the video has been reviewed.

1. Who were the Asahi?

2. Why were the Asahi considered “heroes”?

3. When did Japanese immigration to Canada begin?

4. List some of the hardships that Japanese Canadians, including the Asahi, had to face when they immigrated to Canada.

5. Where did the Asahi play baseball?

6. What made the Asahi so successful? Provide examples.

7. Explain the “David versus Goliath” reference mentioned in this video.

8. What was the cause of anti-Japanese sentiment in 1941?

9. What decision did Prime Minister King make that changed the lives of all Japanese Canadians?

10. Do you support his decision? Explain?

11. Make a list of what the Japanese Canadians lost during the Second World War.

12. Describe the conditions faced by the Japanese Canadians during internment.

13. What type of work and leisure pursuits were the Japanese Canadians limited to during internment?

14. How were the internment camps funded?

15. What options did the Japanese Canadians have once they were released from the internment camps?

Post-viewing Discussion

1. If you had to defend the actions of the Canadian government in 1941, what would you say?

2. As a Japanese Canadian what choice would you have made, in terms of where you would settle, after you were released from the internment camps? Use specific reasons to support your answer.

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Timeline of Japanese Canadian History

Definitions

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From the time the Japanese first started to consider Canada their new home, they experienced opposition. Until the eve of the Second World War they managed to develop deep roots in various communities and a deep love for Canada despite many challenges, including racism and riots. The Second World War gave those who feared or did not like the Japanese Canadians an excuse to continue to treat them as enemies who did not belong.

Timeline

1877 The first recognized Issei takes up permanent residence in Canada. He ran a gift shop, food store, and hotel in Victoria, British Columbia.

1883 The first Japanese immigrant is employed at the Hastings Sawmill in Vancouver, later the largest employer of Japanese immigrants in Canada.

1887 Steveston, British Columbia, becomes the second-largest Japanese Canadian settlement before the Second World War.

1889 The first Nisei is born.

1890s Issei establish stores, boarding houses, and other businesses along the streets of Vancouver, especially on Powell Street. This neighbourhood becomes the major settlement of Japanese Canadians until the Second World War.

1893 First recorded strike takes place in the fishing industry against Japanese fishers.

1894 The first Christian church for Japanese immigrants opens in Vancouver.

1900 Honma Tomekichi, a naturalized Canadian citizen, applies to be included on the voters' list. After refusal by the Collector of Voters, a British Columbia judge declares *ultra vires* (without legal authority) a clause barring Asians from voting, but this decision is later overturned by the Privy Council of Britain in 1902.

1903 Amid increasing public agitation against Asian immigrants, the British Columbia government makes a first attempt to impose the Natal Act, requiring immigrants to pass a written English examination.

1904 Japanese Canadian farmers begin to settle in the Fraser Valley of B.C.

1905 The first Buddhist temple in Canada opens in Vancouver.

1906 The first Japanese-language school is established in Vancouver.

1906-1908 Emigration from Japan increases as a result of unemployment following the Russo-Japanese War and a widespread crop failure in Japan. More than 9 000 Japanese immigrants enter Canada. Most immigrants settle in British Columbia, but some settle in Southern Alberta, Toronto, and Montreal.

1907 (September 9) An anti-Asian group gathers in Vancouver and inflicts severe damage on Japanese immigrant quarters. The riot is immediately followed by a general strike of Vancouver's Asian workers.

Minister of Labour and future prime minister W.L. Mackenzie King is appointed to head a Royal Commission to assess the damages, and awards \$9 000 for losses.

Further Research

To learn more about the current Japanese Canadian community, consider visiting the Web site of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre at www.jccc.on.ca or the Japanese Canadian National Museum at www.jcnm.ca.

1908 The Hayashi-Lemieux “Gentlemen’s Agreement” restricts further Japanese immigration to 400 male immigrants and domestic servants per year, plus returning immigrants and their immediate family members.

1914 The Asahi Baseball Club is founded in British Columbia. It starts as a team for juveniles and becomes a powerhouse, winning a number of local championships. In those days the players are advised by their managers to ignore racist remarks by fans and not to argue with the umpires.

1916 After being rejected in British Columbia, approximately 200 Issei volunteers travel to Alberta to join Canadian battalions of the British army and are shipped to Europe. Fifty-four are killed and 92 wounded.

The first Nisei to graduate from a Canadian university as a qualified school teacher is unable to find employment, except teaching English in the Nikkei community.

1919 Nikkei fishers control nearly half the fishing licenses (3 267) in British Columbia. In response, the B.C. government reduces the number of licenses to “other than white residents.” Over the next five years, licenses to Nikkei continue to be reduced.

1923 The “Gentlemen’s Agreement” is reactivated after pressure placed by the British Columbia government upon the federal government, and further immigration is limited to 150 per year. British Columbia passes a resolution proposing to limit the activities of all “Orientals” in the province.

1927 A report commissioned by the British Columbia government, designed to prove that Japanese Canadians were taking over the province, finds that Japanese Canadians own 9 238 acres of agricultural land valued at \$1 252 063.

1928 The “Gentlemen’s Agreement” is modified to include family members in the annual 150 quota.

1931 The First World War veterans receive the franchise and become the only Japanese Canadians qualified to vote.

1938 In response to public agitation against Japanese Canadians, the prime minister appoints a board of review to investigate allegations of illegal entry of Japanese citizens. After investigating 1 881 individuals, the board finds that the allegations are unfounded.

1937-1941 The Asahi beat the best Japanese-American teams to claim the Pacific Northwest championship for five consecutive years. They become heroes in the Japanese-Canadian community.

1939 On September 10 Canada declares war on Germany.

1941 Of the 23 303 persons of Japanese origin in Canada, 75.5 per cent are Canadian citizens (60.2 per cent Canadian-born and 14.6 per cent naturalized citizens).

On January 7 a special committee of the Cabinet war committee recommends that Japanese Canadians not be allowed to volunteer for the armed services on the grounds that there is strong public opinion against them.

Summarized from: www.najc.ca/timeline.htm

THE ASAHI BASEBALL TEAM REMEMBERED

The War Measures Act

Did you know . . .

David Suzuki, one of Canada's best known scientists and media figures, was sent to an internment camp at Slocan B.C.? The experience encouraged him to always work harder to prove himself. He has been very active in the fight against prejudice and discrimination in Canada. To learn more about Suzuki's environmental work visit the David Suzuki Foundation at www.davidsuzuki.org.

Did you know . . .

The War Measures Act has been applied on two other occasions? It was also used during the First World War and the October Crisis of 1970.

Long before the Second World War, Japanese Canadians were often targets of racism and treated as second-class citizens. When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in December 1941 a wave of hysteria swept across Western Canada. Mackenzie King's government was pressured by anti-Japanese sentiment in British Columbia, including the provincial government itself, to do something about the feared threat of "disloyal" Japanese Canadians.

In 1942 the Canadian government, through the War Measures Act and the Defence of Canada Regulations, rounded up 22 000 Japanese Canadians, forcibly evacuated them from their homes, and relocated them in camps in the interior. This happened despite the fact that the RCMP had concluded that the Japanese Canadians were not spies, enemy aliens, nor a threat to national security.

All Japanese-Canadian property, including boats, cars, homes, businesses, and personal effects, was taken by the government and sold at auctions. Other Canadians bought their neighbours' possessions. The Japanese Canadians saw little or none of the money collected from these sales. These items were generally sold for a fraction of their true worth.

Most of the men were sent to labour camps where they built roads. Women and children were confined to the internment camps. These camps were extremely overcrowded. The four-by-eight-metre shacks people lived in were not built to protect them from the harsh Canadian winters and usually lacked electricity and running water.

At the end of the Second World War, in late 1945 and 1946, Japanese Canadian families reunited and either moved eastward to the Prairies or Ontario. Six thousand were sent to Japan. Many spoke no Japanese and had never even seen the country. Anti-Japanese sentiment remained strong after the war. With no homes or businesses the Japanese Canadians were forced to start over with no assistance. They had to report to the RCMP if they were moving any farther than 80 kilometres from home. They did not obtain their citizenship right away, and they did not get to vote in federal or provincial elections until 1949. Just as the RCMP had concluded before Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, there was still no evidence found after the war of any Japanese Canadians committing treason or being disloyal to Canada. In fact, some had struggled to enlist and fight for Canada in Europe.

To Do

1. If you had 24-hours of notice of relocation to an internment camp and could only bring one suitcase, what five items would you pack and why?
2. Write a one-page letter from the point of view of either a Japanese Canadian mother, father, youth, young child, single male, or senior who has been separated from a family member. Include details about your day-to-day experiences by describing the impact relocation has had on your life. Comment on relevant aspects such as school, family, friends, work, material possessions, and/or health.

Discuss

1. If you had to explain to a younger generation why internment took place in Canada from 1942 to 1945 what would you say? Discuss your thoughts with your classmates.
2. Assume that you are a reporter for the CBC and the Japanese Canadian community is commemorating an anniversary of internment.
 - a) Develop a list of five questions you would ask an internment survivor.
 - b) Discuss with your classmates possible answers to your questions.
3. Discuss with your classmates the short- and long-term effects of internment on the Japanese Canadians.
4. Do you think internment might ever happen in Canada again? Explain carefully.

Note: Be prepared to share the results of your discussions with the entire class.

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Profiles of Japanese Canadians

Ken Kutsukake

Known as “Catcha-catcha-Kutsukake,” Kutsukake was a catcher for the Asahi Baseball Club from 1923 until 1941. In 1941 his father was declared a prisoner of war and sent to jail because he opposed internment, knowing it would separate him from his three children. When Kutsukake was interned with only 24 hours of notice he took with him his catcher’s equipment and his Asahi jersey. When internment ended Kutsukake travelled to Toronto and worked in the travel agency business. He continued to stay involved in baseball, playing and managing teams. In 1972 he organized an Asahi reunion. When asked how he felt about being inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame he said, “We can’t change the past. What’s done is done . . . but this helps erase the bitterness, that’s for sure.” He is 92 years old and currently living in Toronto.

Source: “A new day of glory awaits famed Asahi baseball team,” Dan Girard, *Toronto Star*, June 15, 2003

Kaye Kamanishi

In the mid 1930s Kamanishi’s family owned a lumber mill on Vancouver Island and ran a rooming house near the Powell Street baseball park. He joined the Asahi Baseball Club at age 16 in 1939 and was dubbed the “Vacuum Cleaner” for his talent as a shortstop. The family lost the mill in 1942 during the internment and received just a fraction of what it was worth. They were ordered to pay their own way to the internment camp in Lilloet, B.C. Kamanishi continued to play ball during internment and organized games against the RCMP and local residents. After internment he remained in B.C. and played baseball until 1954. When asked

how he felt about getting inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame he said, “It’s just tremendous pride, no bitterness . . . that’s all finished now.” He is 81 years old, currently living in Kamloops, B.C., still playing softball, and is the 10-time defending men’s doubles champion in badminton.

Source: “A new day of glory awaits famed Asahi baseball team,” Dan Girard, *Toronto Star*, June 15, 2003

Jiro Watanabe

Watanabe was born to a sawmill foreman in Fraser Mills, B.C., in 1924 and began playing trombone at an early age. Watanabe’s family was split up during the Second World War, and he ended up with his brothers in a labour camp in Northern Ontario while his sisters and parents remained in B.C. The family was reunited after the war and they moved to Montreal where Watanabe went to high school with jazz musician Oscar Peterson. He studied at McGill Conservatory of Music, moved to Toronto, and taught at the music school that Peterson opened. His distinguished career as a musician included playing with the Peter Appleyard Orchestra, Nimmons ’N’ Nine, the Rob McConnell Boss Brass, Oscar Peterson, and Anne Murray. Peter Appleyard called him “one of the jazz legends in Canada.” Trumpeter and friend Erich Traugott said of Watanabe: “Once he started telling me about the time he spent in the (internment) camp, how he worked in the kitchen and had to butter the bread with a paintbrush, then he just stopped and said ‘I want to forget about that.’ ” Watanabe died on November 5, 2002, at the age of 78.

Source: “Jazzman Jiro Watanabe played with the greats,” Ashante Infantry, *Toronto Star*, December 4, 2002

In 1945 when the war ended, Japanese Canadians, most of whom were born in Canada and lived in B.C., were pressured to either leave the province and move eastward or were deported to Japan. Whether they stayed in Canada or moved to Japan these internees experienced discrimination and racism, just as they had before the war. They were relocated and received little or no support for resettlement. Starting life over under these circumstances was extremely challenging.

Sid Kiyoshi Ikeda

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, Ikeda's family was taken from their home in downtown Vancouver and placed in stables in Vancouver's Hastings Park. Three months later they were moved to an internment camp called Tashme Place in B.C. Ikeda's father died in 1943. "When the war was over, we left the internment camp. The Canadian government said to us, 'Forget your culture and become a Canadian Canadian,' so we tried to lose our identity." "I tried very hard not . . . to be Japanese." Ikeda's family moved to Toronto after the war, and Ikeda put himself through school while working full time to support himself and his family. Eventually he became an engineer and Eaton's national manager of Energy Conservation and Environmental Programs. In 2001 Ikeda became the special ambassador of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto. When asked about the mistreatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War he says, "I never had any anger." But he does add that the Redress Agreement in 1988 has helped. "I believe in friendship through cultures. If we can do that, we can show the world that all peoples can work together and bring peace and harmony and prosperity."

Source: "A culture in full bloom 'When I but see the blossoms my heart's sorrows disappear,'" Nicholas Keung, *Toronto Star*, April 17, 2001

Raymond Moriyama

When Moriyama was 12 years old his father was taken as a prisoner of war in his own country—Canada. In 1942 his family lost their home and their hardware store when he, his sisters, and his mother were sent to a series of internment camps for Japanese women and children. After the war Moriyama became a student of architecture and urban planning, graduating from the University of Toronto in 1954 and McGill University in 1957. He started a company named Moriyama and Teshima Architects. His first commission was the Toronto Japanese Cultural Centre in 1958. Included in the buildings his company has designed are the Scarborough Civic Centre, Ontario Science Centre, and the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto. When asked about his feelings of the past and present he says, "You can't hate your own (fellow Canadians), and besides, hating someone or something never works in your favour." Moriyama is 73 years old and living in Toronto

Source: "An architect's reflections on Canadian life," Mary McGrath, *Toronto Star*, May 8, 2000

Discussion

1. Make a list of three things each of these internees have in common. Discuss this list with your classmates.
2. a) Why do you think the internment survivors mentioned above stayed in Canada after the war ended?
b) If you were a Japanese Canadian who survived internment would you have stayed in Canada or moved to Japan? List reasons to support your answer.
3. What significant impact did the internment have on the people described and quoted above?
4. What personal qualities or characteristics are necessary in order to live a successful life after an experience such as being wrongfully interned and then continuing to experience discrimination after the internment has ended? Make a list and share it with your classmates.

THE ASAHI BASEBALL TEAM REMEMBERED

Redress

Definition

According to the *Canadian Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, redress means to remedy or rectify a wrong.

Further Research

To learn more about the current concerns and activities of the NAJC, go to www.najc.ca. The Canadian Race Relations Foundation is at www.crr.ca. It provides information about current issues in Canada and the world. Check out the special information pages for youth.

By the mid 1970s the 30-year ban on access to many Canadian Second World War documents was over. Historian Ann Gomer Sunahara completed her research in the National Archives of Canada and wrote a report titled “The Politics of Racism.” Sunahara summarized memos and reports that indicated that the Japanese internment in Canada during the Second World War was politically motivated and not put into place as a security measure as the federal government would have liked everyone to believe.

Around this same time the Japanese Canadian community was celebrating the 100-year anniversary of the first Japanese immigrant, Manzo Nagano, settling in Canada. There also began a redress movement in the United States to seek a public apology and a financial settlement for Japanese Americans from the U.S. government in 1980. These were contributing factors that enabled the Japanese Canadian community to gain the confidence they required to build momentum for a redress movement.

The official campaign for redress was five years in length. It began in 1984 at a meeting of the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC). They

resolved to lobby for a redress agreement that would include acknowledgement of injustices endured during and after the Second World War, financial compensation, amendments to both the War Measures Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms so no other Canadian would have to endure what they did.

The Redress Agreement was negotiated between the Canadian government and the NAJC. It was signed in the House of Commons on September 22, 1988. This agreement included an official public apology, a payment of \$21 000 to each survivor, \$12-million to the Japanese Canadian community, applications for the granting of citizenship to eligible persons of Japanese ancestry who were expelled from Canada or who had their citizenship revoked during the years of the Second World War, acceptance of requests for the clearing of names of eligible persons of Japanese ancestry who were convicted of violations under the war Measures Act, \$24-million for a jointly funded Canadian Race Relations Foundation to foster racial harmony, and a replacement of the War Measures Act with the new Emergencies Act.

To Do

1. Define *Redress Movement*.
2. In groups, take on the identity of one of the following groups: Japanese Canadians who experienced internment, Japanese Canadians who were not alive during internment, non-Japanese Canadians who were in Canada during the internment or non-Japanese Canadians who were not alive during internment. Discuss with your classmates whether or not your group would have been satisfied with the Redress Agreement in 1988 and why.

3. There are other ethnic groups in Canada—Ukrainians, Italians, Doukhobors, Chinese, and Aboriginal Canadians, to name a few—who believe they also deserve a public apology and/or financial compensation for human-rights violations inflicted upon them by past Canadian governments.
 - a) Research one of these Canadian groups. Explain the human right(s) that have been violated and the type of compensation they are requesting. Also, note how the Canadian government has responded to their requests. Do you agree with the government's response to this group?
 - b) In one paragraph explain whether or not you think all Canadian groups with complaints of human rights violations against the Canadian government should be heard and compensated. Carefully support your views.