

Immigration and Racial Justice

Canadian Immigration: A Brief History

Canada as a nation was built on immigration. Home to Indigenous peoples, Canada is only a nation because of

- Violent colonization
- Ongoing settler colonialism (which is also violent)

Colonization: By moving into Indigenous land, establishing control (through violent means), and settling the land (encouraging immigration in a settler colonial model), Canada was eventually established



Ongoing settler colonialism: Canada continues to exist as a nation today because of ongoing settler colonialism (the practice where immigrants continue to live on Indigenous land as a result of past and continued theft, violence, and exploitation)



****It is important to remember that throughout the history of (and present-day) immigration in Canada, Indigenous peoples have continued to resist colonial violence and fight for self-determination (the rights of Indigenous peoples to “autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs”)¹**

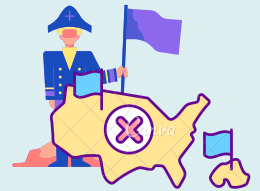
1. Siyám, 2021

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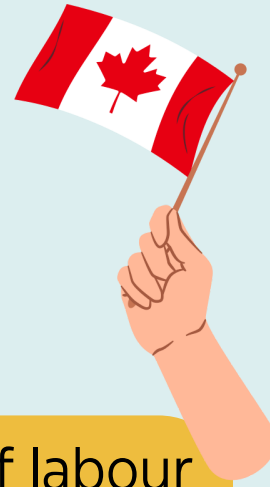
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Creating a "White Canada"

In the early days of Canadian history immigration was focused on creating a state of whiteness (aka a **White Canada**)



However, as a result of labour demands, racialized (im)migrants were forcibly brought to Canada (such as enslaved folks)

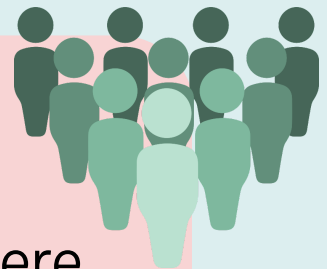


Additionally, racialized (im)migrants folks were sought for labour-specific immigration (such as Chinese labourers) in the late 19th century



However, these (im)migrants folks were not considered Canadian by the state or white Canadians and were subject to racism and discrimination that had violent (and deadly) effects

As Canada grew (in large part because Chinese labour on the Canadian Pacific Railway allowed people to move across Canadian provinces), there were efforts in the late 19th and early 20th century to populate and develop parts of Western Canada



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Their Labour Is Welcome - But They Aren't

As highlighted in our '[Addressing Anti-Asian Racism](#)' resource, laws were purposely been used to keep racialized immigrants outside of Canada

- However, when labouring bodies were necessary for the 'development' of Canada, racialized (im)migrants were sought for underpaid and exploitative labour



While their labouring bodies entered Canada, these people were not considered 'Canadian,' no matter the case. These folks, including **Chinese labourers and Japanese and Sikh immigrants**, were painted as 'bad' and threatening immigrants, in contrast to white immigrants and white Canadians (who were seen as '*good*' and '*civilized*' and thus '**superior**')



Although their labour was welcome in Canada, they weren't. In fact, throughout the late 18th century and early 19th century immigration controls and discriminatory voting, housing, and employment laws were applied to Asian immigrants

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Building The Canada We Know Today

This image of Canada in the past is in direct contrast to the image of Canada today, as a 'land made up of immigrants'



So, at what point did we move towards the Canada of today?

Post-WWII (after 1945) the state continued to experience growing labour demands



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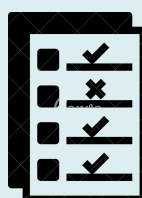


- While many explicitly racist policies and practices, including the *Chinese Immigration (Exclusion) Act* and Japanese internment, were recognized as racist and discriminatory, white immigrants continued to be preferred post-WWII



However, in 1967 Canada introduced the **Points System**

- As a “**standardized and non-racially based system**” the Points System was meant to “evaluate and select immigrants,” bringing skilled and educated migrants into the country²
- Folks who would have been previously rejected from Canadian citizenship because of racial discrimination could now apply to enter Canada under the premise of receiving citizenship



Coming Into Canada Under The Points System

Folks who arrived to Canada under the points system were “landed immigrants” with all of the rights of a citizen (minus the right to vote) – this included the ability to sponsor close family members for entry into Canada

- But, they could apply for Canadian citizenship after residing in Canada for a number of years³

Apply Now



Additionally, in 1971, Canada adopted the *Multiculturalism Act* to “systematically...reduce discrimination”⁴

As such, “[i]n 1971, for the first time in Canadian history, the majority of those immigrating into Canada were of non-European ancestry.”⁵

From the 1970s to 1990s, the Canadian government created even more avenues allowing refugees and immigrants with employable skills or significant financial resources to enter Canada, creating even more waves of immigration

- This created waves of immigration where many folks from Hong Kong, the Caribbean, and Sri Lanka arrived in Canada⁶

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3. Troper, 2022

4. Medina, 2021

5. The Canadian Encyclopedia, n.d.

6. The Canadian Encyclopedia, n.d.; Troper, 2022

Canada: The "land glorious and free"

As mentioned in the Canadian anthem, Canada is the "land glorious and free" in large part due to the points system and policy of multiculturalism. These two changes to the Canadian immigration system really shaped the Canada we know today

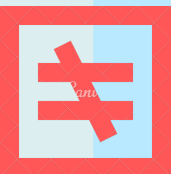
However, were these changes really beneficial for ALL?

While the Points System provided many racialized folks, who were previously rejected from Canadian citizenship, with an opportunity to gain Canadian citizenship, the system is far from free of racism and discrimination

- The Points System admits some folks who are deemed as 'qualified' citizens (based on their English proficiency, educational qualifications, 'employable' skills)

- However, it subjects many other folks (who tend to have lower socio-economic backgrounds or are deemed as 'unable' to 'adjust' to Canadian society) to entering through different (oftentimes less permanent and more precarious) pathways (like the foreign worker program)

- Furthermore, recent immigrants admitted under the Points System continue to face racism and discrimination. They "face an unemployment rate that is almost twice as high as Canadian-born workers of the same age." Additionally, they "earn 48 percent lower wages than similarly-aged non-immigrants with equivalent degrees"⁷



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If Canada never meant to combat racism and discrimination, why would they create the Points System?

Ask yourself, has the Points System or multiculturalism

1. Made meaningful space for racialized populations?
2. Disrupted the status quo that benefits white folks?
3. Redistributed power and privilege?

That's right - the answer is **NO**

In a time where Canada faced labour shortages, needed to continue the settler colonial project (i.e. needed more bodies to occupy Indigenous territories), and needed to move away from explicitly racist policies (since scientific racism was disproved), pivoting to an image of 'multicultural' Canada could be beneficial



- scientific racism: a discredited theory that aims to prove that dominant (white) racial and ethnic groups are superior⁸

The Best of Both Worlds: Canada could easily use the Points System to select the 'best' candidates for immigration, improve their global image, and best of all not dismantle systems of racism and discrimination

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Canada Was Never Made (Or Intended) To Be Glorious For All

“[D]iscrimination is written into the immigration policy by requiring experience in the Canadian market...[T]his requirement diminishes the experience that can be gained abroad, and it enables employers to give lower salaries and positions to immigrants of colour since their existing experience is seen as inferior”⁹

- To enter Canada under the Points System there are various criteria that folks are scored on, which invalidates many immigrants’ professional and educational qualifications (valuing Canadian experience instead)

This disproportionately impacts low waged and racialized immigrants from the Global South, whose experience is seen as **inferior**

Coming to Canada for Work? Here Are 'Other' Immigration Pathways

- In 1973, Canada created Temporary Foreign Worker Programs, “[a] guest worker arrangement [that] is both exploitative and discriminatory, since many of the migrant workers are non-white”¹⁰
- These foreign workers “fill gaps in” the Canadian workforce temporarily¹¹
- However, as workers are often isolated and participating in temporary work, they are more vulnerable to “abuse and rights infringements”¹²

9. Medina, 2021

10. The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2021

11. Molnar, 2018

12. Ibid.

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Why Immigration Is A Racial Justice Issue

Racial Justice: the “systematic fair treatment of people of all races,” which results “in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all”¹³

Through more ‘informal’ and precarious immigration pathways, Canada can continue to fill their labour shortage (while underpaying folks) while continuing to deny or withhold status from ‘unattractive’ workers

- Let’s get it clear, there is NO such thing as an ‘unattractive’ worker – **ALL labour is skilled labour!**
- Through these different immigration pathways, many migrants work in Canada “for decades without the ability to attain permanent resident status”¹⁴



Rather than a **just** system, Canada’s immigration system has effectively created a second class of migrants and immigrants (divided by race and class

- “Canadian immigration policy divides us into two categories: those who arrive with permanent immigration status, and those who don’t. Those who don’t are largely racialized and low-waged”¹⁵

Folks admitted to Canada under these pathways are often subject to precarious work and made more vulnerable to harm

- Migrants are often excluded from labour protections, face prolonged family separation, and are denied access to healthcare, emergency supports, etc¹⁶

13. Human and Civil Rights, n.d.

14. Molnar, 2018

15. Migrant Rights Network, 2020

16. Molnar, 2018; Migrant Rights Network, 2020

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It's clear - inequalities are **BUILT** into our immigration system! The "denial of permanent resident status" excludes folks without status "from basic rights and protections"¹⁷

What can I do to support immigration rights and racial justice?

1. Talk to your friends and family about Canada's inequitable immigration system
2. Educate yourself about Status For All
 - a) **Status For All:** the movement to provide everyone in Canada living without permanent resident (PR) status PR immediately (regardless of any conditions) so that they can access equal rights¹⁸
3. Reach out to, volunteer at, and join local organizations supporting migrants
4. Check out the Migrant Rights Network ([@migrantrightsca](#) on Instagram or www.migrantrights.ca) to educate yourself and see how you can join in on local and global activism (including rallies and petition signing)

17. Migrant Rights Network, 2020
18. Ibid.

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Stay in touch with CCNCTO



CCNCTO serves Chinese Canadian community members, including folks with precarious status. By staying connected, you can help spread awareness about immigration rights and racial justice, support folks harmed by the immigration system, and join our advocacy work to create equitable change

Scan the QR code to add us on WeChat (**Ccnctoronto**) or follow us on Instagram **@CCNCTO**

Check out our [2022 Fundraiser](#) to learn about our work with precarious Chinese migrant workers

Fill in [this form](#) to join our volunteer team and support our various organizing, anti-racism, and equity work

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