

## LESSON 1 HANDOUT 1.2 MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT IN CANADA

The first known Japanese migrant to Canada, Manzo Nagano, stayed ashore in New Westminster in 1877 after the ship on which he arrived departed for Japan. Nagano was likely the first Japanese fisherman in the Fraser River, and thousands of migrants would follow in his footsteps in the half-century that followed. By the mid-1880s, a steady stream of migrants from Japan arrived every year to Canada's colonial settlements on the West Coast. Many were young men who found employment in the fishing, mining, lumber, and construction industries. Most probably envisioned only a temporary stay in North America. The wages they earned in British Columbia allowed them to return home to Japan with funds to purchase land and pursue dreams that would otherwise have been impossible.

Thousands, however, settled in British Columbia. In time, centres of immigrant communities took shape. In 1887, Shinkichi Tamura opened a toy shop at the corner of Cordova and Carrall in Vancouver's East End, helping to lay the foundations for a Japanese Canadian neighbourhood that would be the largest in the country. Part of a bustling and diverse immigrant section of the city, the Powell Street neighbourhood soon housed hundreds of Japanese Canadian businesses, lodging rooms, and residences.

By the 1930s, Japanese Canadians cultivated fruit from the Fraser Valley to the Okanagan, fished the west coast of Vancouver Island and the northern stretches of the Mainland Coast, and owned (and worked in) lumberyards in the Comox Valley. They laboured in mines, cooked meals, ran groceries, gardened, cut hair, and owned small businesses in locales throughout coastal British Columbia. In 1935, after a survey of the Japanese Canadian population, University of British Columbia (UBC) student Rigenda Sumida (a visiting student from Japan) noted the diversity of Japanese Canadian lives. Their average standard of living was lower than the population as a whole, but they had

nonetheless achieved considerable stability. Countering racist caricatures, Sumida reflected, "they are human beings ... as intelligent and progressive as any race on earth, and they are not content to simply exist, but ... desire the comforts, of fine homes, automobiles, radios, and all the other articles or services which Western civilization provides."

Joining a settlement founded on the displacement of indigenous people and intended by its leaders as white and British, Japanese Canadians were never immune to racism. As one immigrant to Vancouver's Powell Street neighbourhood later reflected, "ever since the Japanese arrived in B.C., they have had to endure persistent [racist] campaigns" in which "absurd rumours" coloured public sentiment and motivated exclusionary law at every level of government. Along with Chinese, South Asians, and Indigenous peoples, Japanese Canadians were barred from voting or holding public office. B.C. laws forbade jobs in industry, public works, law, and pharmacy.

The arrival of a boat, the *SS Kumeric* to British Columbia in July 1907 was a pivotal moment in this history. "Hundreds of Mikado's Subjects Reached Vancouver," ran a headline in the *Vancouver Province* on the day the ship anchored in the Burrard Inlet. "The decks of the steamer," reported the paper, "literally swarmed with the little brown men." The paper warned that the passengers (whose actual number included more than 1,100 Japanese migrants) represented "the advance guard of a host soon to locate British Columbia." A racist organization, the Asiatic Exclusion League, spent the next month preparing a major demonstration to protest the Pacific arrivals. When it occurred, on 7 September 1907, the demonstration escalated into rioting, with exclusionists ransacking Chinese and Japanese Canadian businesses and homes in the East End of the city, causing thousands of dollars of damage and sparking international controversy.