

The Effect of the War on Oriental Minorities in Canada

THE presence in Canada of substantial minorities of Oriental race interests us both as citizens and as social scientists. Even those who believe that the task of good citizenship has been made harder by immigration from Asia must recognize that the interest of Canada to the social scientist has been enhanced.

The higher rate of naturalization among the Japanese is in part accounted for by their wish to engage in occupations, such as fishing, for which British nationality is essential, and in part by the existence of a community of men, women, and children which considers Canada as its permanent home.

The economic position of Orientals in British Columbia has, during the first generation, resulted in part from the natural aptitudes of the immigrants and in part from the obstacles which have been placed in the way of their using these aptitudes either by the wisdom of the Legislature or by popular custom. The upshot is that; while you will look in vain in British Columbia for Japanese lawyers, pharmacists, accountants, teachers, policemen, or civil servants, you will find substantial numbers engaged in fishing, logging, and farming.

The Committee found as a fact that there existed “a greater or less degree of suspicion of the Japanese as a people and a feeling that their racial solidarity was likely in an emergency to override their loyalty to Canada and produce subversive or otherwise dangerous activities.” It also reported that no concrete evidence had been adduced in justification of this sentiment and that “charges against individual Japanese or groups of Japanese proved in every instance upon further examination to arise from unsubstantiated rumour and hearsay.

These barriers have a concealed social cost. As long as a de facto colour bar excludes the elite of the Japanese Canadians from occupations for which they are fully qualified by ability and by education, this group will become more and more discontented and embittered. They will have to accept inferior jobs and inferior incomes. Every phrase about democracy, about equality of opportunity, and about tolerance will sound to them like hypocritical mockery. And, as they are the natural leaders of the Japanese minority, their outlook will colour and dominate that of the whole community.

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