The Post-World War II Forced Repatriation and Dispossession of Japanese Canadians

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1. Preface

The forced relocation, systematic dispossession, and postwar exile of Japanese Canadians in the 1940s represent a watershed moment in the history of Canadian civil liberties and state power. The policy of "repatriation"—a state-sanctioned euphemism for what was the forced exile of Canadian citizens—did not emerge in a political vacuum. Rather, it was the culmination of decades of institutionalized anti-Asian discrimination, racial anxieties, and economic protectionism, primarily concentrated in British Columbia. This incident is well documented in the history of Japanese Canadians [1]. Yet I have several subjects I want to learn more about in depth. In this report, I investigate those subjects and add them after a general overview of the “repatriation” policy and its aftermath on the Japanese Canadian community.

2. An overview of the “repatriation” policy and its impact on the Japanese Canadian community

2.1 Underlying causes of the “repatriation” policy

Historically, Canadian immigration legislation had been designed to restrict Asian entry and marginalize established communities. For instance, the continuous journey rule of 1908 [2] and various restrictive amendments to the Immigration Act provided the legal tools to bar and deport "undesirable" demographics on racial and socioeconomic grounds. In the early to mid-20th century, these discriminatory attitudes were reinforced by widespread domestic anxieties. Sociological documentation from the era reveals that white populist movements in British Columbia routinely organized around the fear that Asian labour would lower the standard of living for white workers. Furthermore, Japanese Canadians were frequently accused of being resistant to cultural assimilation, with critics pointing to the existence of Japanese-language schools, Buddhist temples, and low rates of intermarriage as evidence of a lingering, subversive loyalty to the Japanese Empire. It was widely asserted by anti-Japanese political lobbies that many Japanese immigrants who obtained naturalized British subject status did so solely to secure commercial fishing licenses rather than out of a genuine desire to integrate into Canadian society.

This underlying hostility was catalyzed by the outbreak of the Pacific War following the Japanese military attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. Despite explicit assessments from the Royal Canadian

Mounted Police and Canadian military intelligence affirming that the domestic Nikkei population posed no threat of espionage or sabotage, political pressure from British Columbia officials quickly forced the federal government's hand. Prominent anti-Japanese political figures, most notably federal Cabinet Minister Ian Alistair Mackenzie, lobbied aggressively for the total removal of all Japanese Canadians from the Pacific coast. The fall of Singapore on February 15, 1942, and the issuance of Executive Order 9066 by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942 [3], provided the Canadian government with the political justification to authorize the wholesale uprooting of the population. Under the authority of the War Measures Act of 1914, the federal cabinet designated a 100-mile coastal "protected area" from which all individuals of Japanese racial origin—regardless of citizenship—were to be forcibly removed.

The immediate implementation of this exclusion policy was marked by severe administrative harshness. Nearly 22,000 men, women, and children were uprooted from their homes, separated from their families, and subjected to government-enforced curfews and interrogations. The primary processing center was established in the livestock buildings of Hastings Park in Vancouver, where families were housed in concrete-floored pens separated only by sheets, living in close proximity to the stench of animal manure. From Hastings Park, the population was dispersed: adult males were largely sent to highway construction camps in the Rocky Mountains, while families were relocated to isolated, neglected ghost towns in the British Columbia interior, such as Slocan City, New Denver, and Tashme, or sent to agricultural sugar-beet farms in Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario.

2.2 The Administrative Machinery of Coercion and the Repatriation Survey

As the war neared its end in August 1944, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King announced a dual policy of domestic dispersal and postwar exile. The government sought to permanently prevent Japanese Canadians from returning to the Pacific coast while simultaneously reducing their total domestic population. To achieve this, the Department of Labour's Japanese Division was tasked with administering a nationwide "loyalty survey" in the spring of 1945. The survey was presented to interned individuals aged sixteen and older, presenting them with a stark choice: agree to be "repatriated" to Japan once hostilities ceased, or move immediately to unfamiliar, often hostile communities east of the Rocky Mountains.

Although the federal government maintained that signing the repatriation forms was entirely voluntary, the administrative environment was highly coercive. Internees were deeply traumatized by years of confinement, had lost their homes and livelihoods, and faced severe restrictions on purchasing property or securing employment in Eastern Canada. Within the interior camps, placement officers utilized systemic pressure to compel signatures. A statutory declaration by Kameo Kumano, an internee at the Tashme camp, illustrates the severe coercion utilized by state officials: Kumano was willing to relocate east, but because his wife was confined in the New Denver Sanatorium, he was told he must depart. When he initially refused to sign the repatriation forms, Department of Labour Placement Officer E. F. Roberts threatened to cut off his payroll and terminate his family's maintenance allowance, leaving him with no alternative but to sign.

To further encourage repatriation, the government offered economic incentives, including paying for the passage to Japan and providing extra food ration coupons, which appealed directly to families facing

destitution. Slocan City, New Denver, and Tashme became hubs of anxiety and rumor, with Tashme ultimately being designated as a specialized internment camp to segregate those who had opted for repatriation. The survey was also administered to highly vulnerable individuals, including single-parent families, psychiatric patients unable to fully comprehend the forms, and older first-generation immigrants (Issei) who felt too old, language-barred, or impoverished to rebuild their lives in Eastern Canada. Consequently, nearly 50 percent of the interned population signed the survey under severe duress. Following the surrender of Japan in August 1945, thousands of these individuals realized the catastrophic state of the defeated nation and applied to cancel their repatriation requests, but the federal government initially refused to rescind the orders.

2.3 The Legislative Framework of Deportation: Orders-in-Council P.C. 7355, 7356, and 7357

To ensure that the deportation policy would not lapse with the scheduled expiration of the War Measures Act on December 31, 1945, the federal cabinet took decisive legislative action. On December 15, 1945, the government issued three pivotal orders-in-council under the authority of the War Measures Act, which were subsequently continued under Section 4 of the National Emergency Transitional Powers Act, 1945. These legislative instruments provided the formal legal framework to execute the mass deportations and strip citizens of their legal rights.

Legislative Instrument	Date of Enactment	Targeted Demographic	Primary Statutory Mechanics and Consequences
Order-in-Council P.C. 7355	December 15, 1945	Japanese nationals, naturalized British subjects, and natural-born Canadian citizens aged 16 and over.	Authorized the Minister of Labour to issue compulsory deportation orders for individuals who had requested "repatriation" and had not revoked their request prior to specified deadlines, including their wives and children.
Order-in-Council P.C. 7356	December 15, 1945	Naturalized British subjects of the Japanese race.	Provided that any naturalized British subject deported under P.C. 7355 would automatically lose their British subject status and Canadian citizenship upon departure.
Order-in-Council P.C. 7357	December 15, 1945	Japanese nationals, naturalized persons, and natural-born citizens of the Japanese race.	Mandated the establishment of a federal commission to investigate the loyalty and postwar cooperation of Japanese Canadians, with power to recommend individuals for

Legislative Instrument	Date of Enactment	Targeted Demographic	Primary Statutory Mechanics and Consequences
			deportation and citizenship revocation.

These orders-in-council represented an extraordinary expansion of executive authority, enabling the cabinet to deport natural-born Canadian citizens and strip naturalized subjects of their status without judicial trial or parliamentary debate. Prime Minister King defended these measures in Parliament on December 17, 1945, asserting that the unique circumstances of the war and the "peculiar character" of the problem required broader and more expeditious action than standard immigration statutes allowed.

2.4 Strategic Legal Resistance and Constitutional Interventions

The publication of the deportation orders provoked immediate moral outrage and mobilized a broad coalition of civil libertarians, religious organizations, and legal scholars across Canada. Condemning the mass deportation of Canadian citizens as a dangerous erosion of basic constitutional rights, critics launched an organized campaign to challenge the federal government's authority. Central to this resistance was the Toronto-based Cooperative Committee on Japanese Canadians, an influential coalition that grew to include over thirty organizations, including major Christian churches, labor unions, the National Council of Women, and the Canadian Jewish Congress.

The Cooperative Committee worked in tandem with the Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy to gather evidence of state coercion within the internment camps. They collected sworn statements detailing the threats used by placement officers to compel signatures on the repatriation forms. Furthermore, to bypass strict wartime censorship affecting publications like the Kaslo-based *New Canadian*, the committee established an independent magazine, *Nisei Affairs*, to coordinate resistance among second-generation (Nisei) Japanese Canadians nationwide.

When the federal government scheduled the first deportation shipments for mid-January 1946, the legal team of the Cooperative Committee, led by Vancouver lawyer Robert J. MacMaster, identified a strategic vulnerability in the government's plans. Realizing that while the deportation orders themselves were shielded by executive authority, the *detention* of individuals prior to embarkation could be challenged in a postwar context, MacMaster threatened to file hundreds of individual writs of *habeas corpus* [4]. This systemic legal intervention threatened to entirely disrupt the government's tightly scheduled maritime transport program.

Faced with the prospect of chaotic and highly public court battles, Justice Minister Louis St. Laurent and Deputy Minister F. P. Varcoe concluded that it was politically prudent to refer the constitutionality of the orders-in-council directly to the Supreme Court of Canada. The resulting reference case, *Reference Re Persons of Japanese Race* (argued by Andrew Brewin and J. R. Cartwright), centered on whether the executive branch's emergency powers under the War Measures Act extended to the deportation and denaturalization of Canadian citizens. Brewin argued that the term "deportation" was legally restricted to the return of aliens, and that deporting citizens violated both Canadian common law and

international law, which had recently categorized the forced transfer of civilian populations as a war crime.

On February 20, 1946, the Supreme Court of Canada delivered a deeply divided and complex ruling :

- **Japanese Nationals and Naturalized Citizens:** The court ruled unanimously that the deportation of foreign nationals and naturalized British subjects was constitutionally valid.
- **Natural-Born Citizens:** In a split 5-to-2 decision, the court upheld the validity of deporting natural-born Canadian citizens of Japanese origin.
- **Wives and Children:** In a narrow 4-to-3 decision, the court ruled that the provisions of P.C. 7355 allowing for the compulsory deportation of dependent wives and children who were not themselves deportable under other categories were *ultra vires* (beyond the legal power of the cabinet).

This deeply divided ruling was subsequently appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, which served as Canada's highest appellate court at the time. On December 2, 1946, the Privy Council declared that all three orders-in-council were entirely *intra vires*, concluding that during a national emergency, the Canadian parliament and cabinet possessed virtually unlimited legislative authority to preserve the security of the state, overriding any principles of international law or common-law citizenship.

Despite this absolute legal defeat, the prolonged litigation succeeded in delaying mass deportations for over a year. During this time, public sentiment shifted dramatically. Major newspapers, political figures like CCF National Chair Frank Scott, and influential senators began openly condemning the government's actions as a "farce of citizenship". Realizing that executing mass forced exiles of Canadian citizens was no longer politically viable, the Mackenzie King administration formally repealed the deportation orders-in-council on January 24, 1947.

2.5 Implementation, Departure, and Demographics of the Exiled

Although the remaining deportation orders were repealed in early 1947, the federal government had already executed the exile of nearly 4,000 individuals during 1946. Between May 31 and December 24, 1946, five United States troopships commissioned by the Canadian government departed from Vancouver, carrying 3,964 Japanese Canadians to a war-ravaged Japan.

Vessel Name	**Departure Date (1946)**	**Number of Deportees**	**Key Demographics and Camp Origins**
SS *Marine Angel*	May 31	672	Included 565 voluntary and coerced deportees directly from the Tashme internment camp.

Vessel Name	Departure Date (1946)	Number of Deportees	Key Demographics and Camp Origins
SS *General Meigs*	June 16	1,100	Comprised voluntary and coerced deportees, excluding Tashme residents.
SS *General Meigs*	August 2	1,377	Included 157 deportees from the Tashme internment camp.
SS *Marine Falcon*	September	500	Comprised 421 individuals from British Columbia, with the remainder from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec.
All Five Vessels Combined	May 31 – Dec 24	3,964	51% Canadian citizens by birth, 34% Japanese nationals, and 15% naturalized Canadian citizens.

The demographic composition of the exiled population highlights the extreme nature of the policy. More than half of those sent to Japan were Canadian-born citizens who had never set foot in Asia, including hundreds of teenagers and children who were legally classified as "repatriates" solely on the basis of their racial origin.

2.6 The Reality of Exile: Transnational Destitution and Dislocation

The individuals exiled to Japan arrived in a country completely devastated by years of total war and occupied by Allied military forces. The physical voyage itself was marked by severe hardship, with many deportees, such as thirteen-year-old Roy Uyeda, becoming violently seasick during the long Pacific crossing. Upon disembarking at the Uraga and Yokosuka repatriation centers on Tokyo Bay, the deportees were met with immediate desperation. Local Japanese residents, suffering from extreme food shortages, routinely swarmed the arriving trains to beg the deportees for food.

From the repatriation centers, the exiled traveled by train to their ancestral family villages in prefectures such as Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Kagoshima, Mio, Osaka, and Tokyo. For many Nisei who had lived their entire lives as Canadians, the journey through Japan was deeply traumatizing. Traveling through Hiroshima, Roy Uyeda recalled a completely flattened wasteland of rough timber and makeshift shelters. Similarly, Margaret Eto recalled being terrified by atomic bomb survivors—whom she described as "scarred, hairless, skeleton-like figures"—attempting to board the trains. Hiroshi Kumagai described postwar Tokyo as a vast, flat landscape of red-tin-roofed huts where one could see clearly from one side of the city to the other.

In addition to physical destruction, the exiled faced severe economic destitution, starvation, and social alienation. Having had all of their Canadian assets liquidated, families had no savings or resources to draw upon. Tragic stories of starvation and disease characterized the early years of exile. Thirteen-year-old Kikuye Urata died of starvation in Japan in November 1947, and the Kawashita family, who had already suffered the drowning of their three-year-old daughter Tomiko in the Sumallo River shortly before leaving the Tashme camp, endured years of severe destitution and malnutrition. Socially, the deportees were rejected by local citizens, who viewed them as foreign nationals rather than "true" Japanese, forcing the exiled Nikkei to cluster together in marginal spaces for mutual support.

Furthermore, returning to Canada in the postwar era was exceptionally difficult. Exiled citizens who wished to return were forced to apply for "clarification of citizenship" at the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo, where they faced discriminatory hurdles. Unlike European-Canadians who received government-funded return passage if destitute, Japanese Canadians were treated like new immigrants, requiring external sponsors to guarantee they would not become a public charge. The desperation of these families is illustrated by the sons of WWI veteran Ryoichi Kobayashi; because their family could not afford the return transit, four of his sons volunteered to serve as Canadian soldiers in the Korean War simply to secure a free, military-funded return to their native land.

2.7 Systematic Dispossession and the Inadequacy of Postwar Redress

Parallel to the physical displacement and exile of the population was the systematic economic destruction of the community. When Japanese Canadians were uprooted in 1942, their properties and personal belongings were vested in the federal Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property. Although state officials publicly assured the community that their assets would be held in protective trust for safekeeping, the Custodian's office, operating out of Vancouver's Royal Bank Building, quickly became the administrative headquarters for the permanent dispossession of the population.

Starting in 1943, the federal government authorized the forced liquidation of all Japanese Canadian real estate, commercial businesses, farms, personal belongings, and fishing vessels. These forced sales were executed without the owners' consent, with properties routinely sold at a fraction of their actual market value. The proceeds of these sales were then placed in individual accounts with the Custodian, from which the government deducted the monthly costs of feeding and sheltering the internees in the camps, effectively forcing Japanese Canadians to pay for their own unlawful confinement.

The scale and impact of this dispossession is illustrated by specific case studies of properties seized and liquidated under this regime:

Case Study or Family	Original Canadian Origin	Experience of Dispossession / Internment	Postwar Experience and Exile in Japan
Torazo Iwasaki	Saltspring Island, British Columbia	Owned a 590.5-acre property that was vested in the Custodian of	Received only $5,000 during the war, later awarded $7,000 by the Bird Commission

Case Study or Family	Original Canadian Origin	Experience of Dispossession / Internment	Postwar Experience and Exile in Japan
		Enemy Property and sold against his protest.	under protest. Filed a lawsuit in 1967, lost at the Supreme Court, and died bitter.
Yoshimi Susan Maikawa	Cumberland, British Columbia	Interned in Canada; family had no savings, jobs, or homes remaining due to systemic dispossession.	Exiled to Japan where she observed that deportees had to rely on each other due to rejection by domestic Japanese; later returned to Canada.
Roy Uyeda	Vancouver, British Columbia	Interned in Slocan, B.C.; deported at age 13 with his widowed father and two sisters.	Witnessed the devastation of Hiroshima; utilized English language skills to work with U.S. occupation forces before returning to Canada.
Ryoichi Kobayashi	Vancouver, British Columbia	First World War veteran; deported to Japan where his family experienced extreme financial hardship.	Initially denied repatriation to Canada in 1957; four of his sons signed up to serve in the Korean War as Canadian soldiers to secure passage back to Canada.
The Kawashita Family	Tashme Internment Camp, British Columbia	Interned under harsh conditions where three-year-old Tomiko Kawashita drowned in the Sumallo River.	Exiled to Japan where daughter Kuniko and the remaining family endured years of destitution and severe malnutrition.

On Saltspring Island, for example, eleven properties were seized by the Custodian. Among these was the 590.5-acre estate of Torazo Iwasaki. Despite writing numerous protest letters to the government, Iwasaki's land was sold against his wishes. In protest, Iwasaki initially refused to cash his compensation checks. Under intense pressure, the government established the Royal Commission on Japanese Claims (the Bird Commission) in 1947 to investigate financial losses. However, the commission operated under narrow terms of reference, refusing to investigate the legality of the forced sales and

compensating claimants based on depreciated wartime valuations rather than actual market values. Iwasaki was ultimately awarded an additional $7,000 on top of the original $5,000, which he accepted under protest. Decades later, in 1967, the eighty-year-old Iwasaki brought a formal lawsuit against the Canadian government, which he ultimately lost at the Supreme Court of Canada, dying a bitter man.

2.8 Constitutional Legacies and the Redress Movement

The systematic dispossession and exile of Japanese Canadians left a permanent scar on the community and reshaped the legal landscape of the nation. Because of the forced sales, Japanese Canadians had no homes, neighborhoods, or businesses to return to when travel restrictions were finally lifted on April 1, 1949, resulting in the permanent destruction of historical enclaves like Vancouver's Powell Street. For decades, the community lived with the silence, shame, and economic devastation of the internment era.

However, the legal struggle against the deportation orders also marked the beginning of a modern human rights movement in Canada. The realization that Canadian citizenship could be stripped and citizens exiled through executive orders-in-council under the War Measures Act galvanized postwar legal reformers. This systemic failure of Canadian law directly influenced the drafting of the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960 and the subsequent entrenchment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, ensuring that arbitrary exile and the revocation of citizenship based on racial origin would be unconstitutional.

Following decades of community organizing and public education, the National Association of Japanese Canadians successfully secured a formal apology and settlement. On September 22, 1988, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney publicly apologized in the House of Commons for the wartime injustices, internment, and forced deportations. The historic redress package included $21,000 for each surviving internee, the formal reinstatement of Canadian citizenship for those who had been deported, $12 million to the National Association of Japanese Canadians to support the community, and $24 million to establish the Canadian Race Relations Foundation to work toward the elimination of systemic racism. This settlement served as a critical, albeit partial, acknowledgment of the state's severe moral and constitutional failure during and immediately after the Second World War.

3. The nature of the 3,963 exiles

3.1 The family breakdown

Historical documentation and federal archives do not typically provide a single, clean "household" or "family" count because the Canadian government’s forced survey and subsequent exile records tracked people as individual **"**applicants" and "dependents**"** under the War Measures Act.

However, we can determine a highly accurate breakdown of how these 3,964 individuals were organized into family units by examining the demographics of the ship manifests. A massive portion of those 3,964 individuals did not travel alone; they were forced to move as entire multi-generational nuclear families. The demographic breakdown of the exiles reveals this familial structure.

- 1,308 were children under the age of 16. These were Canadian-born Nisei (second-generation) children who were completely dependent on their parents and had no legal say when their families were sent away.
- The remaining 2,656 individuals were adults, split between aging, first-generation parents (Issei) and older, teenage or adult Canadian-born children who felt culturally and morally obligated to accompany their vulnerable or sick parents to a war-torn Japan.
- While a definitive, official "family count" registry does not exist in the federal summaries, historians who study the ledger (such as those working with Library and Archives Canada and the *Landscapes of Injustice* project) estimate the total number of family units at between 800 and 1,000. This estimate is based on the average historical size of a Japanese Canadian household in the 1940s, which usually consisted of two parents and roughly 2 to 4 children or dependents.
- Sadly, the data shows that the families who ended up on those ships were often the most fractured and vulnerable units in the internment camps. They included single-parent households who had lost their breadwinner to separate forced labour camps, elderly couples with limited English literacy who felt too destitute to start over east of the Rockies, and families trying to reunite with relatives who had been stranded in Japan when the war broke out.

3.2 The assets

The largest academic study of Japanese Canadian dispossession, the *Landscapes of Injustice* project, integrated the 1946 exile manifests into a massive, searchable relational database.

By linking the ship manifests directly to the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property case files, their demographic mapping uncovered a direct correlation between property loss and exile:

- The Asset Factor:
  The data revealed that families with lower net worths, or those whose property (such as fishing boats or small farms) had been completely liquidated for next to nothing by the Custodian, were drastically overrepresented on the ship manifests.
- Geographic Clusters:
  By tracing the pre-war addresses listed on the ship logs, researchers found distinct clusters. For example, a heavy concentration of families on the manifests originally came from tight-knit, single-industry communities like Steveston (fishing) and the Fraser Valley (berry farming). When their economic lifelines were permanently sold off by the government in 1943, these families were left with no capital to resettle east of the Rockies, effectively forcing them onto the ships.

3. 3 Chronological Passenger Demographics (The Five Sailings)

Archival breakdowns of the manifests show that the demographic and psychological makeup of the passengers shifted dramatically across the five sailings between May and December 1946:

Expedition / Date	Primary Ship	Key Demographic Characteristics
Sailing 1 & 2 *(May & June 1946)*	*SS General M. Meigs*	Heavily comprised of single men, nationalist sympathizers, and individuals from the Angler Prisoner of War camp who were deeply embittered by their treatment.
Sailing 3 & 4 *(August & October 1946)*	*SS General M. Meigs /* *SS Marine Falcon*	The demographic shifted drastically to **entire family units**. Manifests from these months show the highest concentrations of women, infants, and school-aged children who had been living in the family camps (like Slocan and New Denver).
Sailing 5 *(December 1946)*	*SS General M. Meigs*	Known historically as the "last boat." Manifests reveal this cohort was largely made up of people who desperately tried to cancel their repatriation requests after the legal challenges began in the Supreme Court, but were forced onto the ship anyway before the government halted the policy due to public outcry.

3.4 From the internment camps to Vancouver

In 1946, the movement of Japanese Canadians from the interior internment camps back to the coast of Vancouver—where they were to board ships for their forced exile to Japan—was systematically organized by the federal government, primarily through the Department of Labour. Depending on the location of the camps, two primary modes of transport were used to bring the deportees to Vancouver:

3.4.1 From the Kootenay Valley Camps (Slocan, Lemon Creek, Popoff, and Bay Farm)

The Kootenay region camps, located in southeastern British Columbia, relied primarily on rail transport. Slocan City served as the primary transfer, logistical, and processing hub for the surrounding camps in the Slocan Valley.

- The Slocan City Train Station:
  Internees from camps like Lemon Creek, Popoff, and Bay Farm were gathered at the Slocan City train platform with their boxed baggage and belongings.

- The Rail Journey to Vancouver:
  They boarded Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) passenger trains directly from Slocan City. These trains—many of which travelled along the Kettle Valley Railway route—carried the exiled families directly through the mountains to Vancouver. The train route was: Slocan City, Castlegar, Midway, Rock Creek, Myra Canyon, Penticton, Princeton, Brookmere, Coquihalla Pass, Hope, Vancouver.

3.4.2 From Tashme (Near Hope)

Because Tashme was the largest camp and was situated much closer to Vancouver (14 miles southeast of Hope along the Hope-Princeton Highway corridor), road transport was highly practical.

- Buses and Trucks:
  For major departures, such as the group that left on May 31, 1946, the government brought buses directly into the Tashme camp. Families boarded these buses, which then drove them down through the Fraser Valley directly into the city of Vancouver.

- Hope Train Station:
  In other instances, deportees from Tashme were transported to the nearby Canadian National Railway (CNR) station in the town of Hope, where they boarded trains bound for Vancouver.

3.4.3 Arrival at the Vancouver Waterfront

Whether arriving by train or bus, the deportees were taken directly to the Vancouver harbour. The trains and transport vehicles brought them to the Canadian Pacific Railway's Pier A. Here, families were processed on the docks by the RCMP and Department of Labour officials before immediately boarding the waiting, commissioned U.S. Army transport ships (such as the SS *Marine Angel* or SS *General Meigs*) to begin their voyage across the Pacific.

3.5 Financial difficulties of the repatriated Japanese Canadians

Japanese Canadian deportees were permitted to bring their money to Japan, but they faced severe financial restrictions, highly unfavourable exchange rates, and strict banking regulations imposed by the Allied occupation authorities that left them in extreme financial distress.

- Strict Cash Limits**:**
  Upon landing in war-ravaged Japan, deportees were restricted from holding significant amounts of physical currency. They were permitted to convert and receive only 1,000 yen per person in cash.

- Frozen Accounts:
  Any additional funds beyond this small cash limit that the deportees brought from Canada were placed into frozen bank accounts that they were legally barred from touching or withdrawing. This left many families functionally destitute despite technically having savings.

- Devastating Exchange Rates:
  The money they were allowed to convert was exchanged at an official rate set by the occupation authorities of 13.5 yen per Canadian dollar. This rate was less than one-third of the Canadian

dollar's actual market value. Consequently, deportees effectively lost 50% to 80% of the value of their wealth through the conversion process alone.

- Inadequate Government Grants:
  For those deportees who had been completely dispossessed of their property in Canada and had no personal savings left, their only means of support was a meagre $200 grant provided by the Canadian government. This small sum was quickly rendered worthless by the rampant inflation and severe food shortages gripping postwar Japan.

3.6 Oscar Orr Reports

3.6.1 Lieutenant-Colonel Oscar Orr

The difficulties faced by repatriated Japanese Canadians in Japan were recorded and reported to the Canadian government by Lieutenant-Colonel Oscar Orr. The collection of his reports is called the Oscar Orr Report.

Lieutenant-Colonel Oscar Orr played a unique, complex, and deeply revealing role in the postwar exile of Japanese Canadians.

In April 1946, Lt-Col. Orr travelled to Japan as the Officer-in-Charge of the Canadian War Crimes Liaison Detachment (Far East), tasked with investigating and prosecuting "minor" Japanese war criminals at the Yokohama and Hong Kong trials. However, while stationed in Tokyo, the Canadian government assigned him a secondary administrative task: serving as the Department of Labour's primary liaison to receive the approximately 4,000 exiled Japanese Canadians arriving on ships such as the *S.S. Marine Falcon* and the *S.S. General M. Meigs*.

Between 1946 and 1947, Orr sent a series of vivid, official dispatches back to the Departments of National Defence and Labour in Ottawa. These documents—collectively known as the Oscar Orr Reports—are highly regarded by modern historians because they provide rare, firsthand evidence from a high-ranking Canadian military official witnessing the immediate, devastating consequences of the "repatriation" policy.

3.6.2 Key Revelations from the Orr Reports

Lt-Col. Orr's dispatches paint a grim picture of the physical, psychological, and financial state of the exiled Canadian families upon hitting the ground in devastated, occupied Japan:

3.6.2.1 The Financial Devastation (The Exchange Rate Trap)

The most persistent warning in Orr’s reports concerned the ruinous banking and monetary regulations enforced by the Allied Occupation.

- The Canadian government forced deportees to convert their life savings into Japanese yen at an official fixed rate of 13.5 yen per dollar.
- Orr reported to Ottawa that this artificial rate was less than one-third of what the dollar was actually worth on the local markets. He explicitly wrote that Canadian families were **"losing about 80 cents on each dollar."**

- He formally urged the government to halt or alter how money was transferred to prevent future exiles from *"having the greater part of their money taken away from them."*

3.6.2.2 Appalling Conditions and Baggage Loss

Orr was responsible for processing the arrivals and handling their belongings. He documented massive administrative failures regarding their personal property:

- He reported that the deportees arrived in exceptionally poor, precarious condition, suffering from the physical toll of the trans-Pacific journey.
- He tracked rampant issues regarding lost, stolen, or severely damaged baggage, recording that families who had already lost their homes in British Columbia were now seeing their last remaining personal effects destroyed or lost in transit.

3.6.2.3 The Despair of the Canadian-Born Youth

Orr paid close attention to the demographics of the arrivals, particularly the children and teenagers who were Canadian citizens by birth. In an evocative dispatch following an arrival in 1946, he wrote:

"The majority of the younger people, especially those in their teens, were obviously depressed and all desirous of returning as soon as possible... Most of them in the teenage group were unable to eat the food supplied."

He noted that these young Canadians, raised on Canadian food and culture, were visibly shell-shocked by their immediate contact with the harsh realities, rationing, and desolation of postwar Japan. Orr strongly advised Ottawa that any future exiles should strictly concentrate on bringing food and clothes rather than currency.

3.6.3 Historical Significance of the Reports

In the broader history of the Japanese Canadian dispossession, the Oscar Orr Reports are significant because they capture a form of displacement and loss that fell completely outside the scope of the Bird Commission.

While the Bird Commission (1947–1950) limited its investigation strictly to the flawed, forced-property sales conducted by the Custodian of Enemy Property *within Canada*, Orr's files captured the subsequent, uncompensated financial ruining of families at the hands of the state during the deportation process itself.

3.6.4 Where to Find the Records

The original physical records and correspondence sent by Orr are preserved at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in Ottawa. They are located within the Department of Labour Fonds:

- Archival Reference: RG 27, Volume 669, File 23-2-17-20 (titled: *Japanese Division. Segregation and Repatriation. Reception of Canadian Repatriates in Japan. 1946 - 1947/06*).
- Digitized transcriptions and academic analyses of these specific files are accessible online through the Landscapes of Injustice Digital Repository (the keyword Oscar Orr).

3.6.5 An example of the report by Oscar Orr

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS SUPREME COMMANDER FOR THE ALLIED POWERS

Tokyo, Japan 17 Dec. 46

Secretary, Department of National Defence, OTTAWA, Ontario, Canada.

ATTENTION: War Crimes Investigation Section

Japanese Repatriates from Canada. Baggage of Siezo YONEMURA

For Department of Labour.

2. Reference unnumbered telegram apparently dated 11 Dec regarding lost baggage. This wire is from the Department of National Defence, but no doubt had its origin in the Department of Labour.

3. A search has been made at Kurihamma where the baggage was all stored for a short time, and this baggage is not there. It is likely that other friends going to the same district arranged to have the baggage sent to them. Inquiries are under way. Asajiro YOSHIOKA, the consignee mentioned, claims that he was told nothing about any of this baggage other than that he was the nominal consignee.

4. This man may consider himself very fortunate that he decided not to repatriate, and if he never recovers his baggage he will still be a great deal better off than those who have returned. In this connection I think that proper representation should be made to someone to protect any future repatriates from having the greater part of their money taken from them by either the American Government or the Japanese Government by way of the exchange and banking regulations, the plain fact of the matter being that the money with which the Japanese repatriate leaves Canada shrinks in transmission to a small fraction of its real value, then on top of this, all except 1,000 yen per head is placed in a frozen bank account by the Japanese Government, this latter expression meaning that while the depositor gets the bank book showing a credit, he cannot withdraw money except at a specified monthly rate, this specified monthly rate being considerably less than what is required to live on, and I am not sure whether they are allowed to draw it out in addition to any money they may be earning.

5. I occasionally come in contact with some of these repatriates, and also hear from them by letter. A great many of them are having a hard time to get enough food, others have been fortunate enough to get employment with the army of occupation, etc., but even their employment does not help much because they are only permitted to draw a certain part of their salary in cash, the rest is taken into frozen bank accounts again. As the Japanese have already had one experience with these-called "frozen bank account" they now refrain from using banks any more than they can help.

6. While it may be said that what happens to the repatriate after he comes to this country is no concern of the Canadian Government, my understanding is that many of the minors are Canadian citizens and from what they say have every intentionof maintaining this right in the

future if the opportunity permits. Secondly, it would seem that at the present time Canadian funds are being used to subsidize either the U.S. or Japanese Governments. One fact is outstanding, namely that a greater part of the money that leaves Canada does not in effect benefit the repatriate.

7. While this is strictly not a military matter, I have been in somewhat close touch with the people, and know many of them personally in fact just received a letter from a former employee, telling of the difficulties in obtaining food, etc, and I think the information should be passed along.

(Sgd.) (Oscar Orr) Lt-Col Officer in Charge

Canadian War Crimes Liaison Detachment Japanese Theatre

4. The return of the repatriated Japanese Canadians to Canada

The return of the exiled Japanese Canadians from devastated postwar Japan was a slow, difficult, and multi-decade process. Because the Canadian government stripped them of their citizenship and provided zero administrative or financial help to bring them back, the exile cohort had to engineer their own returns through sheer resourcefulness, community networks, and shifting immigration laws.

The physical and legal journey back to Canada happened in several distinct ways:

4.1 The Allied Occupation Route (The Nisei Loophole)

The earliest wave of returnees utilized their unique linguistic skills to escape the starvation and poverty of occupied Japan in the late 1940s.

- Securing Employment:
  Hundreds of adult, Canadian-born *Nisei* (second-generation) were entirely bilingual in English and Japanese. The Allied Occupation Forces (GHQ/SCAP), led by General Douglas MacArthur in Tokyo, desperately needed translators, typists, and clerks.
- Earning Capital:
  These Japanese Canadians secured relatively high-paying jobs with the U.S. and British Commonwealth occupation forces. This allowed them to survive the postwar economic collapse and, crucially, save enough money in American dollars to afford expensive trans-Pacific commercial ship or airplane passage back to Canada.

4.2 Utilizing Valid Canadian Passports

While the Canadian government systematically tried to revoke the status of anyone who signed "repatriation" papers, a significant legal distinction existed on the ship manifests:

- Natural-Born Citizens:
  Over 2,000 of the exiles were Canadian-born citizens, and more than 1,300 were children under 16 who could not legally renounce their citizenship.
- Many of the young adults had kept physical proof of their Canadian birth or passports. Once the highly restrictive Canadian wartime legal measures completely expired in **April 1949**—and Japanese Canadians were finally granted full freedom of movement and the right to vote—those

with valid citizenship documents began applying directly to Canadian diplomatic missions in Tokyo to secure return visas.

4.3 The "Chain" Family Sponsorship Wave

For first-generation *Issei* (immigrants born in Japan) who had naturalized in Canada, the government had stripped their citizenship completely upon deportation, rendering them "aliens" under Canadian law. They could not simply buy a ticket home.

- The Strategy:
  Families had to return in a staggered, chain-migration pattern. The adult Canadian-born children (*Nisei*) would return to Canada first via the occupation or passport routes.
- Sponsorship:
  Once re-established in Canada—often working in Ontario, Alberta, or slowly returning to the B.C. coast—these children would work for years to save funds and legally sponsor their aging parents and siblings to immigrate to Canada under standard, postwar immigration streams.

4.4 Direct Support from the Home Community

The community that remained in Canada played a vital role in funding and organizing the return.

- Postwar organizations like the National Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association (NJCCA) and various church groups kept direct ties with the exiles in Japan.
- They established relief funds, sent care packages of food and clothing to families struggling in places like Hiroshima and Shigeru, and provided the mandatory legal and financial guarantees (such as housing and job offers) required by Canadian immigration authorities to allow the exiles to clear border control upon arrival.

4.5 The 1988 Redress Agreement (The Final Legal Restoration)

For the final cohort who had been stuck in Japan for decades or unable to navigate the complex immigration system, the door finally opened with the signing of the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement on September 22, 1988.

- As part of the historic apology, the federal government officially reinstated Canadian citizenship to any living person who had been wrongfully expelled or deprived of their status during the 1946 exiles, as well as their direct descendants. This allowed the remaining elderly exiles and their families to freely return to Canada as full citizens.

5. Number of Japanese Canadians who returned to Canada

It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of repatriated Japanese Canadians who ultimately returned to Canada. This is because the Canadian government did not keep official records tracking their return.

Of the 22,000 internees, 3,964 Japanese Canadians were deported to Japan on five repatriation ships between May and December 1946, under the federal government's policy of 'East of the Rockies or Back to Japan'.

As two-thirds of the deportees were Canadian citizens by birth or naturalization (including more than 1,300 children under the age of 16), the majority of the deported population had a legal right to return should the political situation change.

Historians refer to the following estimates to determine how many returned:

5.1 Key Estimates

- 50% estimate (approximately 2,000 people)

The most widely accepted estimate is based on historical research and oral history conducted by Japanese Canadian scholars, particularly the archivist and historian Tatsuo Kage. Mr Kage [5] visited Japan in 1988 as part of a delegation from the Japanese Canadian Association to explain the individual compensation provisions of the 1988 Japanese Canadian Compensation Agreement to Japanese Canadians living in Japan. During that visit, he interviewed Mr Ide, who had served as president of the 'Association of Japanese Canadians in Japan' (an organization formed by the deportees) after the war, and heard the following estimate from Mr Ide.

- By 1989, half of the repatriated Japanese Canadians had returned to Canada.
- As of 1989, there were between 750 and 1,000 deported Japanese Canadians remaining in Japan.
- Between 1949 and 1989, approximately 800 Japanese Canadians living in Japan had died.
- As of 1989, there were approximately 200 to 250 stranded Japanese Canadians

5.2 Estimate following the compensation agreement

During their stay in Japan, the delegation contacted approximately 700 Japanese Canadians. Furthermore, according to Mr Kage, Roy Ito, a Japanese Canadian, received a letter dated 13 January 1993 from the Japanese Canadian Compensation Secretariat stating that '1,337 Japanese Canadians residing in Japan had applied for compensation, and payments had been made to 1,123 of them'. If the 800 who had died by 1988 had been alive, the number of applicants would have been 2,137; therefore, the number of repatriated Japanese Canadians who had returned to Canada by 1988 is 3,964 – 2,137 = 1,827.

Taking these estimates into account, it would be reasonable to conclude that:

- Out of the 3,964 repatriated Japanese Canadians, approximately half had returned to Canada by 1988, approximately 800 had died in Japan, and approximately 1,000 were living in Japan.

5.3 The Mechanics of the Return

The return was not a single mass migration, but a slow, decades-long trickling back that occurred in distinct waves:

- The Allied Occupation Wave (Late 1940s–1950s):
  Because many of the returning Nisei (second-generation, Canadian-born) were completely bilingual in English and Japanese, they quickly found high-paying deployment with the Allied Occupation Forces (GHQ) in devastated postwar Tokyo. Saving money from these positions

provided the initial capital needed to buy ship or plane passage back to Canada as soon as immigration restrictions began to ease in the early 1950s.

- The Family Sponsorship Wave:
  Many parents (Issei) chose to stay in Japan or passed away due to the severe postwar poverty and malnutrition in the country. However, their adult Canadian-born children gradually sponsored one another to return to Canada to rebuild their lives in Ontario, Alberta, or back on the British Columbia coast after restrictions lifted in 1949.

Ultimately, while the precise figures are obscured by a lack of official government data, historians agree that roughly 2,000 of the original exiles chose to return to Canada, leaving behind a small, resilient community of Canadian-born expatriates who spent the remainder of their lives in Japan.

6. Repatriated Japanese Canadians and the Bird Commission

Formally known as the Royal Commission to Investigate Complaints of Canadian Citizens of Japanese Origin**...** (and led by Justice Henry Bird between 1947 and 1950), the Bird Commission had highly restrictive parameters.

Eligibility for compensation was strictly narrowed by the government's Terms of Reference. To be eligible to receive a financial award under the commission, an applicant had to meet very specific criteria:

6.1 Who Was Eligible

- People of Japanese Descent Evacuated from B.C.:
  You had to be a person of Japanese origin (whether a natural-born Canadian citizen, a naturalized British subject, or a Japanese national) who had been forcibly uprooted and evacuated from the "protected areas" of coastal British Columbia after March 1942.
- Property Owners with Liquidated Assets:
  You must have owned real estate (homes, farms, businesses) or personal property (boats, vehicles, household items, farming gear) that was seized and subsequently sold off by the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property.
- Losses Below "Fair Market Value":
  You had to demonstrate that the Custodian sold your property at a price *lower* than its fair market value at the exact time of the sale, **or** that your property was lost, stolen, or destroyed while under the Custodian's direct care.

In total, 1,434 Japanese Canadians successfully filed claims and received some level of compensation before the commission concluded.

6.2 Who Was Excluded (The Gaps in Eligibility)

The criteria were deliberately designed by the federal government to limit liability. As a result, many victims of the dispossession were completely ineligible for any payout:

- Deported Individuals:
  Anyone who had been pressured into "repatriation" and deported to Japan following the war was completely barred from making a claim.

- Losses Outside the Custodian's Sales:
  If a family hastily sold their own property or made private arrangements for their belongings at a massive loss right before being forcibly removed, they were ineligible.

- Depreciation Losses:
  If a property dropped significantly in value *between* the time the owner was forced out (1942) and the time the Custodian actually sold it years later, the commission refused to look at the 1942 value. It only calculated loss based on the value on the specific day the Custodian sold it.

6.3 The Major Limitation

The Bird Commission completely excluded any claims regarding the violation of civil rights, lost wages, disrupted educations, or psychological trauma. It treated the entire internment experience strictly as a flawed business transaction, which is why the community overwhelmingly viewed it as an unjust resolution—ultimately leading to the successful push for the comprehensive Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement decades later in 1988.

6.4 The primary sources for excluding the repatriated Japanese Canadians

The primary historical sources that document how deported or "repatriated" Japanese Canadians were excluded from making property claims to the Bird Commission are located within federal government records, cabinet archives, and the commission's own operational documents.

6.4.1 Federal Orders-in-Council (Executive Legislation)

The primary legal instrument defining the commission's boundaries is **Order-in-Council P.C. 1810** (issued July 18, 1947), which officially created the Royal Commission.

- The Text:
  The directive explicitly stated that the sole commissioner, Justice Henry Bird, was authorized to investigate claims of *"persons of the Japanese race **resident in Canada** on the date of this order."*

- The Exclusionary Effect:
  Because nearly 4,000 Japanese Canadians had already been pressured into signing "repatriation" documents and were shipped to war-torn Japan between May and December of 1946, they were no longer "resident in Canada" by July 1947. This specific phrasing legally barred exiled families from submitting claims for their seized properties.

6.4.2 Official Commission Proceedings and Final Report

- The Bird Commission Final Report (1950):
  Formally titled the *Report Upon the Investigation into Claims of Persons of the Japanese Race Pursuant to Terms of Order-in-Council P.C. 1810*, this document details the procedural handling

of claims. It records that out of more than 22,000 uprooted individuals, only **1,434 claims** were accepted for review, confirming that thousands of displaced or deported individuals were structurally blocked from the process.

- Case Files and Transcripts (Library and Archives Canada, RG 33/69):
  The active transcripts and case files of the Royal Commission show that applications attempted on behalf of individuals residing outside of Canada were thrown out as being "outside the terms of reference."

6.4.3 Community and Legal Advocacy Records

- National Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association (NJCCA) Papers:
  The NJCCA (which formed the Cooperative Committee on Japanese Canadians tto provide legal counsel during the hearings) meticulously documented their fight against these narrow terms. Their records—specifically the preparatory briefs and correspondence from lawyers like Robert McMaster and George Tamaki—include formal, written protests sent to Ottawa arguing that the exclusion of deported community members was a glaring injustice.

- The New Canadian Newspaper Archives:
  As the primary wartime and postwar English-language voice of the community, editorials and articles published between 1947 and 1950 provide immediate, primary journalistic evidence of the community's outrage that their deported family members and peers were entirely left out of the compensation loop.

7. The 1988 Redress Settlement and the repatriated Japanese Canadians

The 1988 Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement had two major sets of implications: (1) national and community-level consequences for Japanese Canadians and for Canada's human-rights framework, and (2) specific implications for the small group of Japanese Canadians who had been deported ("repatriated") to Japan in 1946 and were later granted citizenship and recognition.

- 21,000 individual compensations to each surviving internee. In total, 1,434 repatriated Japanese Canadians remaining in Japan successfully filed claims and received some level of compensation before the commission concluded. We don't know how many repatriated Japanese Canadians who had returned to Canada received individual compensation because they were part of the Japanese Canadians in Canada.

- Recognition of wrongful deportation

  The Redress Agreement explicitly granted Canadian citizenship to those who had been deported ("repatriated") to Japan in 1946, as well as to their descendants. This was a profound symbolic reversal: the state acknowledged that deportation had been unjust, coercive, and discriminatory.

- Restoration of belonging and legal identity

  For repatriated individuals, many of whom had been Canadian-born, the settlement restored:

- Legal citizenship
- Recognition of their rights as Canadians
- Acknowledgment that their forced removal was a violation of human rights

Footnotes

1. Ann Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1981)

2. Canada's Continuous Journey Regulation of 1908 was an immigration rule designed to bar South Asian—especially Indian—immigration without explicitly naming race or nationality. The regulation required all immigrants to arrive in Canada "by continuous journey" from their country of birth or citizenship, on a through-ticket purchased in that country. Because no direct steamship route existed between India and Canada, the rule functioned as a de facto exclusion law.

3. Executive Order 9066, signed by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, authorized the U.S. Army to designate military areas from which "any or all persons may be excluded." Although the order did not explicitly name Japanese Americans, it became the legal basis for the mass forced removal and incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry living on the U.S. West Coast.

4. Habeas corpus is a fundamental legal principle that protects individuals from unlawful detention. Its core meaning is simple and powerful: the government must justify its decision to hold someone in custody. A habeas corpus petition forces the government to:

- Produce the detained person before a court
- Provide legal reasons for the detention
- Release the person if the detention is unlawful

It prevents governments, police, or military authorities from imprisoning people without charge, without trial, or in secret.

5. Tatsuo Kage, *Uprooted Again: Japanese Canadians Move to Japan After World War II* (Victoria: Ti-Jean Press, 2012)

References:

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