

Minority Groups During The Great War

IS IT EVER JUSTIFIABLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE AWAY PEOPLE'S RIGHTS?

When World War One began, Canada had a population of 7.2 million people with 6.4 million of them identifying as British. That meant that 88% of Canadians were English speakers who saw themselves as loyal to the British Empire. With such a dominant British culture in Canada, people from other backgrounds were often treated as less than equal. During World War One this treatment became even worse as the nation threw itself into supporting the war effort.

During the war years, 1914-1918 the rights of many Canadians were taken away during as the government reacted to both local and global events connected to the war. Some people argued that the government's actions were justified to protect Canada during a time of war. Others said that the actions were a form of racism.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

In 1914, discrimination against Aboriginal Canadians was common and that attitude was reflected in recruiting policies as they were not encouraged to enlist. The military argued that Aboriginals should not fight in the military because it was too dangerous for them. They told would-be Aboriginal recruits that the Germans would think they were savages and if captured, would be terribly mistreated. But as the



Francis Pegahmagabow

war dragged on, and the number of volunteers plummeted, the government started welcoming Aboriginal volunteers who began signing up in large numbers. By the end of the war in 1918, about 35% of eligible Aboriginal men had joined the Canadian Forces.

Some Aboriginal men enlisted out of loyalty to the British king. He was descended from Queen Victoria, with whom they had signed treaties and felt a certain affinity for. Other signed up as a way to escape the reserve system that restricted their rights to employment and mobility.

Why might the military in 1914 try and discourage Aboriginal Canadians from joining the war?

In total, about 4000 Aboriginal Canadians fought in World War One. Despite facing racism within the Canadian military, they became valued scouts and snipers - two of the most dangerous and important positions in the war. Scouts were expected to penetrate the enemy's territory and report back to headquarters while snipers were incredible marksmen able to fire into enemy ranks after hours of waiting. Francis Pegahmagabow, an Ojibway from Ontario had an impressive record with 378 kills during the war.

Why might Aboriginal Canadians continue to enlist and participate in the war despite being treated unfairly by the military?

BLACK CANADIANS

Racism was alive and well during WWI. When 50 black Canadians from Sydney, Nova Scotia tried to enlist, the recruiting officer told them: "This is not for you fellows, this is a white man's war." Many white officers believed that black men would make poor soldiers and would not be accepted by white soldiers. As a result, black Canadians who tried to volunteer were usually turned away.



Members of the No. 2 Construction Battalion

Based on the quote above, describe how Canadian society viewed racial equality between white and non-white Canadians.

When black Canadians made their voices heard, and protested this unfair treatment, the army responded by creating a separate group for black soldiers commanded by a white officer: the No. 2

Construction Battalion. Nearly 600 African-Canadian men went overseas to France where they worked to dig trenches and build roads with the Canadian Forestry Corps.



Despite having their own Battalion created, what does having a white commander reveal about the military's view on black soldiers?

THE WAR MEASURES ACT

In 1914, the government passed the War Measures Act which gave the federal government sweeping powers to deal with the kinds of emergency situations it faced during World War I. The act gave the government power to pass laws without the approval of Parliament while Canada was at war. The government could also overrule previous laws, censor the news media, tell manufacturers and farmers what they were to produce, imprison people without trial and label some people enemies of Canada.

Why would Canadians support a law like the War Measures Act during wartime?

GERMAN AND UKRAINIAN CANADIANS

In 1914, more than a million people from Germany and Austria-Hungary lived in Canada as a result of efforts by the government to attract immigrants. Some were recent arrivals while others were the descendants of immigrants who arrived long ago. Some Canadians of British heritage feared that immigrants from enemy countries might be spies and

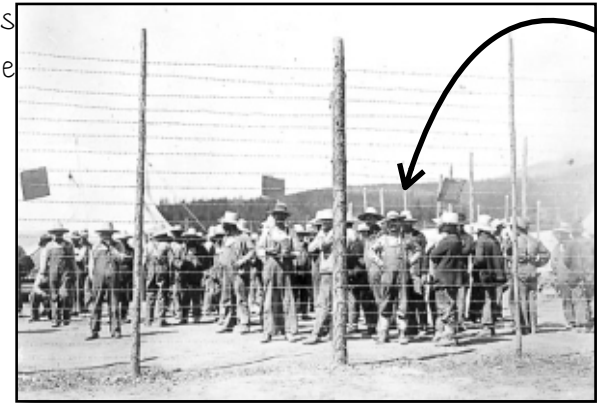


German and Ukrainian prisoners at Castle Mountain Internment Camp in Alberta

compromise Canada's success in the war. As a result, 800,000 people from these countries were labeled enemy aliens under the War Measures Act and had their rights restricted.

Many enemy aliens were required to carry identification papers and report their movements to the police and many lost the right to vote. They were banned from publishing anything in a language other than French or English and they could not leave Canada without permission. Because of people's fears, the government forced more than 8500 Germans and Ukrainians into internment camps, where they built roads and railways, work in mines and clear land. As the

Ukraine was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, they too were seen as enemy aliens.



Interned Germans and Ukrainians during World War One

At the time of the internment, the 400,000 Canadians of German heritage were the 3rd largest ethnic group in Canada after British and French. But schools and universities were no longer allowed to teach the German language, German-language newspapers were banned and some German-Canadians were fired from their jobs. In Montreal and Winnipeg, German-owned shops were attacked by rioters and the Ontario town of Berlin was renamed Kitchener.

Despite their treatment, thousands of Canadians of Ukrainian and German heritage enlisted in the Canadian Forces. How might nationalism and patriotism have motivated these men to sign up?

ASIAN CANADIANS

Like other minorities groups, Asian Canadians faced prejudice before W/WI. Neither Chinese nor Japanese Canadians were allowed to vote, for example even if they were born in Canada. Even though

China and Japan joined the Allies on the side of Canada and Britain, Asian Canadians were still not allowed to enlist in the military. Instead, some created their own military units trained by British veterans and eventually 185 of them served in various battalions in France.



Japanese family waiting for transfer to an internment camp in British Columbia

Complete The Organizer Below Using Information From The Reading

ETHNIC GROUP	HOW THEIR RIGHTS WERE VIOLATED	REASON GIVEN FOR VIOLATING RIGHTS
ASIAN CANADIANS		
ABORIGINAL CANADIANS		
AFRICAN-CANADIANS		
CANADIANS OF GERMAN AND UKRAINIAN HERITAGE		

Based on the information you completed in the organizer above, explain why Canadian citizens would allow the government to strip the rights of other Canadians.
