Canadian Immigration

In 2005, immigration accounted for more than 50 percent of Canada's population growth. Canada's immigrants continue to come mainly from Asia and the Middle East. One in six Canadians is a member of a visible minority.

HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION

Immigration has played a huge role in Canada's history. At the beginning of the 20th century, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, Scandinavians, Americans, and Eastern Europeans came to claim and work the lands of the vast prairies. Only white Europeans were recruited by the government and considered desirable. Non-whites were often turned away, unless cheap labour was needed.

Fifteen thousand Chinese men came to Canada in the 1880s to build the Canadian Pacific Railway. All were denied citizenship. Other immigrants from Asia had a difficult time entering the country. Regulations were devised to keep numbers low—even if they were British subjects living in Commonwealth countries:

- Only 400 Japanese immigrants a year were allowed until 1920.
- Chinese immigrants faced a "head tax" of $50 a person in 1885, an amount that was increased to $500 per person by 1904.
- Would-be immigrants from India were required to arrive on ships that followed a "continuous" or direct route to Canada. No shipping companies followed such a route.
- Thousands of free black people were among Loyalists who settled in Nova Scotia. Before the American Civil War (1861–1865), runaway slaves found refuge in Upper Canada. However, during massive waves of immigration in the first half of the 20th century, people of colour were deliberately excluded. So too were many Jewish people, including those fleeing persecution in Europe in the 1930s.

DID YOU KNOW

In June 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to Chinese Canadians for the head tax and expressed his "deepest sorrow" for the exclusion of Chinese immigrants from 1923 until 1947.

DID YOU KNOW

Three hundred seventy-five Sikh emigrants on board the *Komagata Maru* in May 1914 were barred from entry into Canada at Vancouver despite the fact that they all had valid British passports. The ship was sent back to India.

DID YOU KNOW

In 1939, 907 Jewish passengers who fled Nazi persecution on the ocean liner *St. Louis* were not granted promised entry at their destination of Cuba. Canada and the United States did not respond to their appeals for help. About half of the passengers died in the **Holocaust** after the ship returned to Europe.

DID YOU KNOW
The father of hockey star Paul Kariya was born in a British Columbia internment camp for Japanese Canadians during World War II.

- Full citizenship was not granted to certain ethnic groups. In British Columbia, where most Asian Canadians lived, immigrants from China, Japan, and India did not win the right to vote until the late 1940s. Once groups were excluded from the voting list, they could also be excluded from certain professions, since the right to vote was a precondition for employment in areas such as law, medicine, and pharmacy.
- Twenty-three thousand Japanese Canadians were placed in internment camps in the interior of British Columbia during World War II. They were legally defined as "enemy aliens." After the war, almost 4,000 were forcibly repatriated to Japan. Of these, more than half were Canadian born and two-thirds were Canadian citizens.

THE CREATION OF CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP

In 1947, the Liberal government of Prime Minister Mackenzie King created the legal concept of Canadian citizenship. Until then, Canadians had been defined as British subjects living in Canada or as immigrants. Some immigrants could now qualify for full citizenship after they had resided in the country for five years.

SOURCES

Speech by Prime Minister W.L.M. King

The policy of the government is to foster the growth of the population of Canada by the encouragement of immigration. ...

[A]s respects immigration from Europe, the emphasis for the present should be on the admission of the relatives of persons who are already in Canada, and on assisting in the resettlement of displaced persons and refugees. ...

Selection officers will ... consider applicants for entry into Canada, examine them on a basis of suitability and physical fitness, and make arrangements for their orderly movement and placement. ... In taking these steps, the government is seeking to ensure that the displaced persons admitted to Canada are of a type likely to make good citizens. ...

[M]uch has been said about discrimination. I wish to make it quite clear that Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens. It is not a "fundamental human right" of any alien to enter Canada. It is a privilege. It is a matter of domestic policy. ...

There will, I am sure, be general agreement with the view that the people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population. Large-scale immigration from the orient [Asia] would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population. ...

Source: House of Commons Debates, May 1, 1947, pp. 2644–2646; www.abheritage.ca/albertans/speeches/king_1.html

A COLOUR-BLIND POLICY

By the 1960s, some of the old prejudices that had shaped Canadian immigration and citizenship were fading. In 1962, Conservative Minister of Immigration Ellen Fairclough—Canada's first female Cabinet minister—eliminated most of the entrance regulations that discriminated on the basis of race and country of origin. Most immigrants to Canada, however, continued to be Europeans (see Figure 2.6).

In 1976, Canada created different admission categories. It streamlined the process for sponsoring (supporting) family members and created a **points system** for independent applicants. The system awarded applicants points for knowing English or French and for level of education and job skills. The separate category for refugees was also created.

Removing racial regulations and introducing the new points system led for the first time to major immigration from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Newcomers settled mainly in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, making those cities vibrant centres of **multiculturalism**. By the end of the 20th century, Canada had also become a major refugee-receiving country, admitting thousands of refugees from Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and other places.

DID YOU KNOW

Canada accepted 60,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1979–1980, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War (1965–1973). It also accepted some 30,000 young Americans who fled to Canada to avoid being forced to fight during the war, which Canada did not support.

	Period of Immigration									
	Before 1961		1961–1970		1971–1980		1981–1990		1991–2001*	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total immigrants	894,465	100.0	745,565	100.0	936,275	100.0	1,041,495	100.0	1,830,680	100.0
United States	34,805	3.9	46,880	6.3	62,835	6.7	41,965	4.0	51,440	2.8
Europe	809,330	90.5	515,675	69.2	338,520	36.2	266,185	25.6	357,845	19.5
Asia	28,850	3.2	90,420	12.1	311,960	33.3	491,720	47.2	1,066,230	58.2
Africa	4,635	0.5	23,830	3.2	54,655	5.8	59,715	5.7	139,770	7.6
Caribbean, Central and South America	12,895	1.4	59,895	8.0	154,395	16.5	171,495	16.5	200,010	10.9
Oceania and other countries	3,950	0.4	8,865	1.2	13,910	1.5	10,415	1.0	15,385	0.8

* Includes data up to May 15, 2001

FIGURE 2.6 Place of birth by period of immigration, Canada, 2001. *Source: Statistics Canada, www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/etoimm/tables/canada/period.cfm*