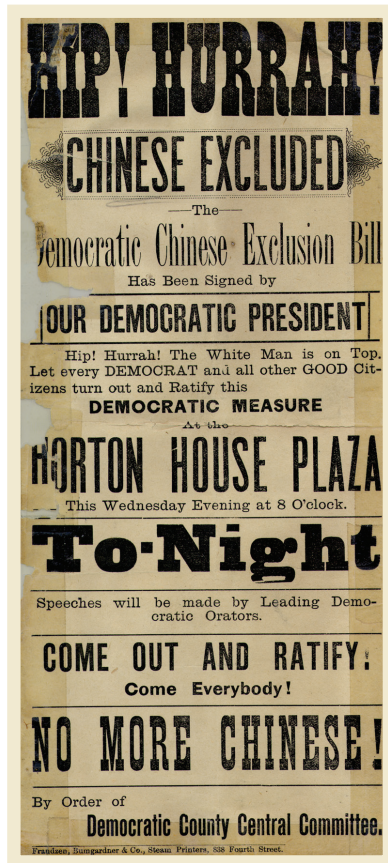


1923 Chinese Immigration Act (Exclusion Act)



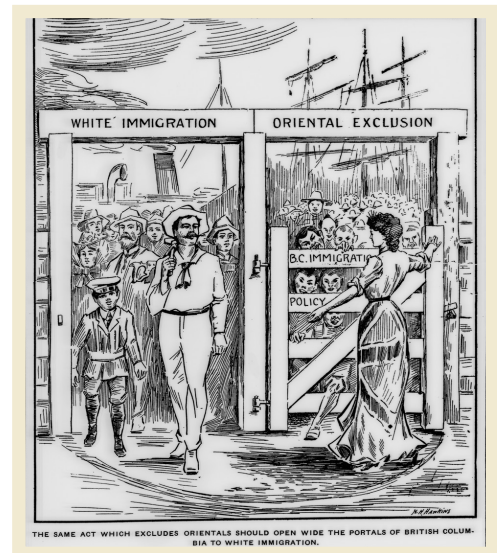
World War I ended in 1918. After the war, Canada faced poor economic conditions. Some people blamed these conditions on visible minorities, like the Chinese people, because they worked for less pay.

Starting in 1903, Chinese people had to pay a \$500 head tax beginning in 1903 in order to enter Canada. Some people felt this was not enough to prevent Chinese people from immigrating to Canada. There was a call from white society to ban Chinese **immigration** altogether. This request began in BC, but had support across Canada.

A new *Chinese Immigration Act* was **legislated** in 1923. It became known as the Chinese Exclusion Act. This new legislation banned Chinese

immigrants from entering Canada unless they were students, **diplomats**, or **merchants**. Chinese people were the only immigrants completely barred from entering Canada.

The act was passed on July 1, 1923—Canada Day. Chinese Canadians renamed this celebration, “Humiliation Day”. As a protest, Chinese Canadians closed their businesses and boycotted Canada Day for years after.



The Head Tax and *Chinese Exclusion Act* were very hard on families. Early Chinese pioneers were not allowed to bring their families to Canada. This resulted in long periods of separation. Chinese wives were left to raise their children in China, and often experienced economic difficulties and starvation. Here is one account of the hardship:



You came here [to Canada] and if you behaved, then you could go home and meet the family again... Sometimes you came here for 30 or 40 years, 50 or 60 years, and never went back to see them... I know of one guy here, when he went back to China to get married, he lived there for a couple of months... He never saw his wife [again] for 40 years... You came in here... year after year, worked a little bit, spent a little bit, couldn't save money to see your wife... So what could you do?

From: Peter S. Li, *Chinese in Canada*, 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1998. P. 68. © Oxford University Press Canada 1998.

The *Chinese Immigration Act* was abolished in 1947.

Vocabulary

diplomats:
officials who represent another country

immigration:
coming to live permanently in a foreign country

legislated:
made into law

merchant:
a person or company who trades goods or products, or supplies goods to a particular trade