

THE HISTORY BEHIND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CANADIAN RACE RELATIONS FOUNDATION

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When my wife and I visited our daughter in Japan in 1995 we accompanied her to an elementary school where she was teaching a grade five English class. She had the students working in teams to record answers on the blackboard to the questions she presented. At the end of the activity she reviewed the responses by putting a circle around the answers that were correct and a check mark beside the answers that were wrong. I asked her after class for an explanation of this difference. Her response was very logical. "In Japan, a check mark is a sign that the answer is incorrect and the student should check the answer again. On the other hand, a circle, around the correct answer, is a symbol for completeness."

With the creation of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation now a reality, all the terms of the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement signed on September 22, 1988 have been completed. For Japanese Canadians, and indeed, for all Canadians, this is a culmination of the victory in our struggle for the rights of citizenship.

Having been deprived of the franchise until 1948; labelled "enemy aliens" during the war; endured pain and humiliation through forced relocation and internment; Japanese Canadians finally received the apology and acknowledgement from the Canadian Government absolving them of any wrong-doing, allowing for the healing process to begin. Also, in signing the Agreement, the Government reaffirmed the principles of justice and equality for all citizens in Canada and pledged to ensure that such violations will not happen again.

I believe that it is important for everyone to have an understanding of why the Foundation was an important component of the redress settlement. In the early stages of the redress campaign, the leaders of the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), at that time representing approximately 55,000 Canadians of Japanese ancestry, realized the need to quantify the losses resulting from the confiscation of properties, internment, forced relocation or expulsion from Canada.

During the first negotiation meetings with the government, the Minister responsible to deal with the redress issue would often raise the question of what the community had really lost. We could not answer the question at that time because we did not have concrete information. In an effort to gather data, the NAJC approached the former Minister of Multiculturalism to conduct a joint study which could be used to educate Canadians on the enormity of the material losses to Japanese Canadians. However, the government refused to be involved in the study or to assist us financially. As a small minority community we could not muster the necessary financial resources to conduct the study. The NAJC could not find an organization outside the Government that they could turn to for research funding.

However, when Price Waterhouse heard that the NAJC was having difficulties finding funds for the research, they offered to conduct a study at cost on the economic losses of Japanese Canadians after 1941. The completed report did play a significant role in justifying demands for a meaningful compensation. How many other groups are there that find themselves in a similar situation, unable to conduct research on racism because of the lack of resources or funds? This was a prime reason why the NAJC proposed an arm's length foundation to deal with racism.

It has always been the NAJC's intention that the redress settlement contain elements to help prevent legalized racism. In May 1986 the NAJC submitted a redress proposal to the government which included: a recommendation to establish a human rights foundation that could provide assistance to other groups in Canada who are targets of racism; and grants for research against racism and discrimination. When the redress agreement was finally negotiated, as a gift to all Canadians, the NAJC agreed to contribute \$12 million towards a national foundation for the elimination of racism in commemoration of those Japanese Canadians who suffered injustices during and after World War II. The Government of Canada contributed a matching \$12 million.

Following the redress settlement, the NAJC representatives collaborated with government officials to draft the mandate for Bill C-43 on the purpose and structure of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation. This was approved by Parliament in 1990. However, despite many overtures by the NAJC to have the bill enacted, the government of the day continued to delay in proclaiming the bill that would officially recognize the beginning of the Foundation.

In the election campaign of 1993 the Liberal Party made a commitment to honour the Japanese Canadian Redress agreement in its Red Book. Finally, on October 29, 1996 at a press conference in Toronto, the

Honourable Hedy Fry, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism, announced the establishment of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation. [The Foundation, as the final component of the redress package, has finally brought closure or completeness to Japanese Canadians for the long standing injustices. In addition, it also brings to all the people of Canada the promise to work towards the creation of a society that ensures equality and justice for all, regardless of race, colour, or ethnic origin.]

