

ANTI-ASIAN RIOT IN VANCOUVER

1907

Canada has been built through the efforts and courage of men and women who, although born in countries around the world, have decided to make this country their home. That contribution is widely recognized today, but this was not always the case.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there were many who believed that Canada “belonged” to the white people who lived there. They believed the country needed to be protected from immigrants from countries like China and Japan, who would take jobs away from white people because it was believed they would work for lower pay. Many people in the United States felt the same way.

In 1905, white workers in San Francisco, California formed an anti-Oriental (or anti-Asian) movement, known as the Asiatic Exclusion League. Its goal was to remove all Asians from North America. This racist group quickly spread its influence north into the west coast American states and up to Vancouver, British Columbia. In 1907, the group launched a riot against Asian businessmen in downtown Vancouver. An estimated 9,000 white protesters attacked Asian businesses, destroying signs and smashing windows.

The Vancouver News-Advertiser reported that Vancouver's Chinese bought guns the next morning to protect themselves. According to the newspaper, “Hundreds of revolvers and

thousands of rounds of ammunition were passed over the counter...before the police stepped in and requested that no further sales be made to Orientals...Few Japanese were seen buying arms, but a bird's-eye view today of the roofs of Japanese boardinghouses and stores in the Japanese district disclosed the fact that the Orientals are prepared for a siege.”

Five days after the Asiatic Exclusion League was formed in Vancouver, it disbanded. While this group has disappeared, the ideas that created it still remain in some places in Canadian society. Even today, some people talk about limiting immigration to make sure that there are enough jobs for “real Canadians.” But, with the exception of First Nations Canadians, we are all newcomers to Canada. We all have a role to play in building lives for our families and making Canada strong.



Damage done by the Asiatic Exclusion League to the store of an Asian man in Vancouver.