



News in Review

October 1999

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In a nation that was built by people escaping harsh conditions in search of a better life, immigration and refugee policies have been issues about which many Canadians often feel ambivalent or perplexed. When illegal migrants land on our shores unexpectedly and under harsh conditions, our principles and sympathies can be severely put to the test. Determining what is the right thing to do, the humane thing, the legal thing, and the realistic and practical thing are questions that demand great wisdom on the part of governments and the general public. Faced with the results of international trafficking in human lives, our decision-making is rendered even more difficult.

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Introduction

Chinese Boat People: Human Cargo

In the summer of 1999 haunting images appeared in the media of ghost ships that had deposited or attempted to deposit illegal Chinese migrants off the shores of British Columbia. The subsequent public debate over the arrival of the migrants was controversial and evoked a wide range of opinions and emotions among Canadians. It was also a debate that has particular relevance in terms of the history of this nation.

In July and August, three ships were spotted and subsequently intercepted by Canadian authorities off Canadian shores. The weary passengers were taken into custody and transferred to a Canadian Forces base for processing. On July 23, 123 migrants came ashore after reportedly spending 39 days at sea. On August 11, 131 migrants were left on shore near the Queen Charlotte Islands after 58 days at sea the ship was later intercepted and on August 31, 190 migrants arrived after 72 days at sea. A fourth ship was reported to have arrived earlier in the summer, off-loaded its passengers and then sunk during the return voyage. Canadian officials who boarded the ships reported that conditions on the vessels were horrible. The upper decks were filthy, and below decks it was even worse. There was no lighting, buckets were used for toilets, and drinking water had become contaminated. Remarkably, the passengers from each ship were in reasonably good physical health.

The public response to the landings was unequivocal although mixed. Some Canadians were angered at the arrival of the migrants and demanded that they be sent back. For them, three

ships arriving unexpectedly in just under six weeks was a provocation not to be ignored. Expressing overt hostility, some saw these arrivals as a threat, that of being overrun by illegal arrivals from poorer nations. Other Canadians called for understanding and compassion. Still others advocated a detached, reasoned approach, referring to established refugee procedures. Government officials appealed for calm. The migrants, meanwhile, were taken into custody at Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt, outside Victoria. There they were fed, given shelter, and questioned by authorities. Of the 123 people on the first ship, for example, 37 were charged with human smuggling offences and the rest, having claimed refugee status, became part of a legal process that eventually determines who is or who is not a genuine refugee and therefore is allowed to remain in Canada and eventually be eligible for full Canadian citizenship. Despite the fact that there has been a commonly held belief that it is easy to enter Canada by claiming refugee status, the reality is that around 60 per cent of all refugee claims are rejected in immigration hearings each year.

The arrival of the migrants, primarily from Fujian province in China, has caused many Canadians to reflect on some of our fundamental social and historical principles. For a nation built by people escaping harsh conditions in search of a better life, what is our obligation to those who wish to come to Canada for the same reasons? In terms of accepting refugees immigrants applying through existing channels is another matter Canada's history is not unblemished; we have accepted some and not others. It is important to note the passengers on these ships were illegal migrants. The central issue of the story is how we sort out or balance legal considerations, humanitarian concerns, and the practical ramifications of illegal migration. The issue of trafficking in human lives adds another disturbing dimension to the story.

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Droit d'asile

Chinese Boat People: Human Cargo

This past year, Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto were hosts to a new mega-musical based on French author Victor Hugo's classic novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (The Hunchback of Notre Dame), which recently was also released as a feature-length animated Disney production. An English-language version of the musical is currently in production and also promises to have the impact of such stage spectacles as *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*.

Like all great literature, the novel evokes universal issues through the setting and the characters, in particular that of the outsider, the dispossessed, and those who are excluded from mainstream human society and forced to live lives apart, often in extreme poverty. *Notre-Dame de Paris* is a tragic love story of three men of diverse status in a strict social hierarchy, each of whom experiences obsessive feelings of love and desire for the gypsy Esmeralda herself a symbol of a stateless person. Fate brings Esmeralda and the deformed Quasimodo into a forbidden world and inevitably leads to the story's tragic end. The musical version, which was sold out in Paris as well as the three Canadian cities, adds a contemporary dimension to the story and focuses to a great extent of the plight of the *sans-papiers*, the stateless poor living outside the walls of Paris's famous cathedral. France as a former colonial power has experienced an influx of immigrants and refugees over the years from its former colonies, especially from the African continent.

The great cathedral, the glory of human civilization to date and a

sacred shrine, symbolizes a world of peace and security to which the sans-papiers have no access. But the sans-papiers are at the gates. Nous sommes des étrangers, des sans-papiers, des hommes et des femmes sans domicile. Oh! Notre-Dame. Et nous te demandons . . . asile! asile! (We are strangers, without papers, homeless men and women. From you, Our Lady, we seek . . . asylum! asylum!)

If one is granted droit d'asile or the right of asylum, one is given sanctuary, protection, shelter, and support, especially those in distress. Asylum is a universal notion that throughout history has been perceived as a universal right but practised differently from culture to culture. In some cultures, one would never turn a stranger, in need or otherwise, away from one's door. The host is responsible for any travellers seeking shelter under his or her roof. Political and diplomatic asylum are two important variants of the principle. Traditionally, churches have been places of asylum because the secular authorities do not have control over sacred places.

In modern times we face a dilemma. To whom, to how many, and how often do we as wealthy nations offer asylum in the form of refugee status?

As you watch this News in Review report, consider to what extent the notion of droit d'asile plays a role in the events. What evidence is there, if any, that as seen in the news report there is a genuine need for asylum, a genuine right to asylum, or a moral obligation to grant asylum?

Follow-up Discussion

To what extent do you think that the universal notion of droit d'asile still applies in the 20th century? What do you anticipate the status of this principle will be in the 21st century, a few months from now?

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In Search of a New Life

Chinese Boat People: Human Cargo

Canada and the United States are defined as First-World countries because most citizens of these countries enjoy a high standard of living. This includes, for the most part, having comfortable and affordable shelter, clean and accessible drinking water, an abundance of natural resources, and high-quality education and health care. Not surprisingly, Canada and the United States are the envy of many throughout the world. North America has been dubbed The Golden Mountain in China, because of the riches that our continent enjoys. Not surprisingly, many people want to move here. But how does a person from another country move to Canada? One option is to apply to immigrate to Canada. Our current federal immigration policy gives preference to immigrants who have skills or training that are in demand in Canada, and they must have a sufficient amount of money to be able to establish themselves in their new country. Presently, the waiting list to immigrate is long. On average, it takes two and a half years to process a skilled applicant.

Another way a person can gain admission to Canada is as a refugee. A refugee, according to the United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees, is someone who has to flee his or her homeland because of persecution based on the person's race, religion, nationality, or membership in a political group. Canada, as a signatory to the United Nations International Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, has a declared commitment to consider the case of any person arriving in the country and declaring himself or herself a refugee. This does not

mean that all people who arrive in Canada and declare themselves refugees are allowed to stay. In 1998, only 45 per cent of individuals claiming refugee status were accepted into the country.

But in the summer of 1999 a major controversy occurred in Canada after four ships carrying Chinese citizens arrived off the shores of British Columbia. The ships' passengers had not applied to immigrate to Canada, nor were they refugees in the conventional sense. What little information that could be gathered from the tired and frightened Chinese passengers seemed to indicate that they had come to Canada to escape a life of economic hardship in China. Currently, there is no provision for someone being an economic refugee.

After watching this News In Review report a second time, formulate answers to the following questions:

1. What did the Chinese boat people go through to get to Canada? Suggest events that in all probability happened in China and on their journey.
2. What will their lives be like if they are allowed to stay in Canada? Record both positive and negative aspects.
3. Should Canada accept a limited and defined number of people as refugees each year? Provide at least three reasons in your answer.

What A Difference A Prefix Makes

Migrate and immigrate both come from the Latin verb *migrare*, which means to move, to be in transit but, like migrate in English, it suggests movement without a sense of direction or a final destination. The prefix *im* means in and suggests a moving into a specific area. The Chinese boat people in this news story are migrants. They are trying to move from one country to another in search of a better life but have not followed the rules in terms of immigration to Canada; they have not applied officially to move into Canada. In legal terms, that little prefix means a lot.

It is in part this differentiation that has created so much controversy in Canada. After reading the differing opinions below and perhaps watching the video again, summarize in point form the main arguments concerning the actions of the Chinese migrants. Then write a one-page editorial on this issue.

This is not a crisis. A total of 450 migrants have arrived in B.C. aboard decrepit boats since July 20. That is less than the 500

refugee claimants who land at Pearson Airport every month. . . .
Deporting the migrants the moment they set foot in Canada, as many Canadians want Ottawa to do, might have signalled that illegal immigrants are not welcome here. But it would have violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. From an editorial in The Toronto Star, September 2, 1999

There s over a billion people there [in China]. Are we just going to put the message out that if you can get out, we ll take you? [I] object to the Canadian refugee determination system, set up after a Supreme Court ruling, that said everyone who arrives on Canadian soil is entitled to a fair refugee hearing. John Reynolds, Reform MP (West Vancouver-Sunshine Coast)

I hold the freedoms that we have very dear. They may be inconvenient sometimes, but those rights are a protection afforded to everyone in Canada. Elinor Caplan, Federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration

I think Canada has made its refugee policy much too liberal, and the immigration policy much too tight. The system encourages illegal entries, and we are going to see more.

Wilfred Wan, chairman of Success, a Vancouver-based group that helps immigrants

Historically, refugees make exemplary citizens. They are exactly the type of immigrant Canada should want -young, hardy, creative, courageous. And as the most recent studies [of Southeast Asian refugees in the 1980s] indicate, almost all of them today are gainfully employed, and some have set up businesses that employ other Canadians. The percentage of them on social assistance is lower than the national average. Irving Abella, York University professor and author

Fake refugees are using political asylum to achieve their objectives without meeting the criteria set out in Canadian law. The results of this large-scale corruption are serious. International trafficking in human beings provides huge returns for the international crime organizations, adding to their drug- and arms-smuggling income, and corrupting officials around the world. William Bauer, former ambassador and member of the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board.

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An International Concern

Chinese Boat People: Human Cargo

According to the United Nations, 22 million people worldwide have currently been displaced by war and persecution. Only a small percentage of these millions are able to legally migrate to safe countries. Some of the other displaced persons try to enter safe countries illegally. As a result, the United Nations estimates that human smuggling operations worldwide are worth about \$9-billion (U.S.). Countries like Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada have become key destinations for illegal migrants. Although the arrival of ghost ships off the coast of British Columbia in the summer of 1999 generated heated debate across Canada about the country's immigration and refugee policies, the number of people illegally smuggled into Canada is actually quite low. According to government figures, approximately 1365 Chinese citizens were smuggled into Canada in 1998. Of those illegal arrivals, it is believed that up to two-thirds slipped across the border into the U.S., heading for Chinatown in New York. But how do these illegals get here, and what do we know about the people who risk everything to get to North America?

Snakeheads

Sociologist Kolin Chin, of Rutgers University, published a 600-page report on Chinese smuggling in 1998. According to Chin, the smugglers, known as snakeheads, are mostly Chinese-Americans stationed in New York City or Bangkok, Thailand. The snakeheads run a profitable business, charging up to \$50,000 (U.S.) per person to smuggle someone into North America. The

snakeheads are affiliated with highly organized crime gangs in China who bribe local officials to turn a blind eye to the smuggling. According to James Dubro, a Toronto-based author who has written extensively on Asian crime, it is no secret who the big smugglers are in China. As Dubro says, You can't bring a ship in and organize all those people without a lot of people knowing about it. Once the migrants board the ship, they hand their forged passports and other documentation over to the snakeheads and upon arrival declare themselves undocumented refugees. After posting an immigration bond, the snakeheads return the forged documents to the migrants, and then smuggle them into a network of underground safe houses in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto. Within a matter of days, most of the migrants have slipped into the United States.

In an article by Peter Cheney published in The Globe and Mail, Cheney says that the most common crossing point from Canada to the United States is the native reserve at Akwesasne, near Cornwall, Ontario. In December 1998, 35 people were arrested in connection with a smuggling ring that allegedly passed at least 3600 Chinese illegals through Akwesasne over a two-year period.

The Illegals

It is very difficult to gather information about the recent boat people who arrived in Canada. It is alleged that they have been told what to say by the snakeheads, and have been warned that if they provide any information to Canadian authorities their families back in China will be at risk. Despite this fact, immigration officials have been able to determine that most of the migrants appear to be factory workers or farmers from Fujian province where they were paid approximately \$6 (CDN) per day. They are enticed into making the illegal trip to North America by Chinese gangs that promise them a life of economic prosperity overseas. One of the migrants who arrived on July 20, 1999, reported that he had been promised a job that would pay \$1800 (U.S.) a month. But a decent, well-paid job is not what awaits the migrants. Most will find work in restaurants or sweat shops controlled by the snakeheads, where they will work long hours for low wages. Some females will end up being forced to work in the sex trade. Because most of the migrants are not able to pay the full fee to the snakeheads at the beginning of the trip, most will work for at least six or seven years to pay off their debts. And during this time they will be watched 24 hours a day by gang members to prevent their disappearance. If the migrants do disappear, the snakeheads will go to their families in China to recover the money owed.

A Cold Reception

In addition to the financial burden facing the migrants, they also have to deal with the anger and hostility of Canadians who do not want them here. When the second group of migrants arrived at Port Hardy harbour in August, an angry group of residents was awaiting their arrival. One woman sported a sign stating,

Feed our people first and the headlines of local papers stated simply, Go home. When refugee claimants were escorted through Vancouver's Chinatown by community volunteers, the migrants were bombarded with verbal insults. And an appeal for clothing and blankets for the new arrivals yielded few donations.

Discussion

1. Although many Canadians see the migrants as criminals for entering Canada illegally, in what ways are the migrants also victims?

2. One prominent member of the Chinese-Canadian community stated that even after the migrants get settled here they will likely be disappointed: It's not a good life like the American Dream. What is meant by the term the American Dream? What economic or cultural aspects of North American life might people in other nations attribute to this ideal? In what ways might the reality of life in Canada not fulfill this dream, especially for illegal Chinese migrants?

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The "System"

Chinese Boat People: Human Cargo

Given the population of the world, the enormous numbers of people living in Third-World countries who might dream of moving to Canada for a better life, and given that Canada is still a relatively small nation, in terms of population, but a relatively large nation in terms of physical space, we can easily understand why immigration to this country is desirable and an ongoing process. It is also understandable why clear immigration policies and an immigration system that functions efficiently is important to Canadians. This does not mean that establishing and maintaining such a system is not without difficulties and controversies. It is affected by current public attitudes and, consequently, government policies, current economic conditions and demographics in Canada and worldwide, and some critics would say long-standing, systemic racism. As you read the following information, think about how the immigration process in Canada is subject to these influences and perhaps others.

The Immigration Process

Immigrants play an important role in Canada's economy. Canada has a declining birth rate and aging population and must supplement its population through immigration. Many people are surprised by the fact that over the past number of years Canada has not been able to bring as many immigrants into the country as it wants. In 1998, the Department of Immigration processed 170 000 immigrants, which was 50 000 less than its goal. At the time of this writing, Elinor Caplan, Canada's Citizenship and Immigration Minister, was considering more than doubling the number of immigrants that Canada admits each year, to a

maximum of 500 000. This plan, supported by Ontario Premier Mike Harris, among others, is intended to cushion the severe labour shortages expected in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and parts of Ontario over the next 10 years.

It is not easy to immigrate to Canada. There are three categories of immigrants that may be admissible to Canada. One is as a skilled worker. These immigrants must possess skills or training that are in demand in Canada. Currently, Canada needs about 20 000 computer programmers, so a person with this type of training would likely be able to immigrate to Canada. Another category of immigrant is the business immigrant. These immigrants are investors and entrepreneurs who have a sufficient amount of money to be able to establish themselves in Canada and start businesses to employ other Canadians. The third category of immigrant falls under the family reunification program. Under this program, Canadian citizens can apply to have their spouse, children, or parents join them in Canada.

The main criticism often expressed about our immigration system is that it is inefficient; it simply takes too long for the Department of Immigration to process potential immigrants. In the case of skilled workers, the average processing time is two and a half years. As a result, by the time the applicant has been successfully processed the demand for his or her skills may have ended. A similar situation exists for immigrants admitted under the business category even though their arrival in Canada usually results in jobs for Canadians. The average processing time is 24 months. Under the family reunification program, a spouse will wait between 14 and 24 months to be processed, while parents take, on average, two to three years to be admitted. Some critics have argued that it is because it is so difficult to immigrate to Canada, that more and more people are attempting to enter the country illegally.

The Refugee System

Another way a person can gain admission to Canada is as a refugee. A refugee is someone who has to flee his or her homeland because of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or membership in a political group. Canada, as a signatory to the United Nations International Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, has committed itself and is obliged to consider the case of all individuals arriving in the country and declaring themselves refugees. Canada accepts far fewer refugees than immigrants into the country. In 1998, 12 921 refugees were admitted to Canada after hearings with the Immigration and Refugee Board.

Not all who arrive on Canadian soil and declare themselves refugees are granted refugee status and are allowed to stay in Canada. In fact, for the past three years less than half the people who made refugee claims were granted refugee status in Canada. The Canadian government has the right to detain people who arrive illegally and claim refugee status if the person's identity cannot be determined, if it is feared the person might disappear before the refugee hearing, or if he or she is thought to be potentially dangerous to society. Again, there is quite a considerable backlog in this part of the system. On average, it takes 11 months for a refugee claim to be processed. In the interim, many people abandon their refugee claims and disappear. It is estimated that as many as two-thirds of the people who abandon their refugee claims in Canada have slipped quietly across the border into the United States. The United States government is critical of the way Canada processes refugee claimants and sees us as a weak link in the control of illegal refugees.

Proposed Changes

In response to the criticisms of the current system, and to allay the anger and concern that arose over the arrival of Chinese boat people in the summer of 1999, the government has proposed a number of changes to our laws. Citizenship and Immigration is considering a plan to detain some refugee claimants for months at a time until their status is decided. Immigration officials would do this by suspending the legal requirement that prompt and frequent hearings be held to determine and review whether claimants should be held in detention facilities pending the outcome of their appeal. The proposed change to the Immigration Act would allow for groups of boat people, for example, to be held in detention until they are either granted refugee status or deported. Other proposed changes include hiring additional officers to catch illegal migrants, stiffer jail sentences for those who break the law, and increased disembarkation checks at airports.

Discussion and Activity

1. In your opinion, should changes be made to Canada's policies on the processing of refugees? If yes, how can this be done without infringing on basic human rights?
2. Visit the Web site of Citizenship and Immigration Canada at <http://cicnet.ci.gc.ca/english/refugee/irb-e.html>. Identify what you believe are the strengths and weaknesses of Canada's

immigration and refugee policies.

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A Response From China

Chinese Boat People: Human Cargo

While the arrival of Chinese migrants on British Columbia's shores has created controversy in Canada, it has also become a headache for the Chinese government. It is clear that China wants the world to believe that its communist system of government is successful and that Chinese citizens are happy with the current conditions in that country. Therefore even a small number of migrants leaving the country in search of a better life is negative propaganda for the Chinese government, which continues to deny foreign reporters access to Fujian province to cover the story.

In a strongly worded statement on September 7, 1999, the Chinese government advised Canadian authorities to simply send all the Chinese migrants back to China. Sun Yuxi, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said that this would be the best and most effective way to shatter the illusions of the migrants. Sun Yuxi also blamed the Canadian government for allowing hearings to determine the refugee status of the migrants. By accepting the applications of these so-called refugees, Canada is actually encouraging illegal immigration, says Sun.

It is not surprising that the Chinese government has taken this position. The Chinese government runs the country with a strong arm and does not allow its citizens the freedoms we enjoy here in Canada. Citizens are not allowed to either speak or write about anything that is critical of the government, and the government, fearing possible subversive activities, often cracks

down on people who meet in groups. Frequently criticized for its poor human rights record by the United Nations, Amnesty International, and other human rights groups, the Chinese government stunned the world when it cracked down on student pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Many of the unarmed demonstrators were run over by tanks, or shot by police, and hundreds were arrested.

Unfortunately, Chinese citizens still do not enjoy many freedoms. Human Rights in China (HRIC) is an international, non-governmental organization founded by Chinese scientists and scholars in March 1989. HRIC monitors the implementation of international human rights standards in China, distributes educational materials within China, and provides legal and humanitarian assistance to Chinese citizens in need. According to HRIC, since a number of major changes to the criminal law in 1993, the Chinese government has become even more extreme in its treatment of citizens accused of conspiracy.

An example of this is the case of Liu Xianbian. Liu was sentenced to 13 years in prison in August 1999 after being convicted of conspiracy to overthrow state power. Liu was not defended in court because a series of lawyers withdrew from the case following pressure from the authorities. Liu's conviction and sentencing follows the convictions of fellow Chinese Democratic Party members She Wanbao, Zhao Jianguo, and Gao Hongming, who received prison terms of 12, nine, and eight years respectively for subversion. According to HRIC, these four had done nothing more than peacefully and publicly assert their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Discussion and Follow-up Activities

1. With reference to the information on the previous page, suggest why some people see the illegal Chinese migrant situation as a Catch-22 situation. Are we actually encouraging illegal immigration, as China has said, through our refugee policies?

2. Read more about the Chinese government's crackdown on political dissidents by reading the articles listed below, which can be located on the Internet. After reading one or more of these articles, discuss the following:

(a) Identify some of the rights and freedoms we enjoy in Canada that citizens in China do not.

(b) Why might an authoritarian government like China's take a harsh view of the migrants who left Fujian province for British Columbia?

(c) If these migrants are denied refugee status in Canada what dangers might they face in China upon their return?

Chinese court sentences dissident, the Washington Post, <http://search.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WAPO/19990805/V000703-080599-idx.html>

Chinese dissident crackdown continues, the British Broadcasting Corporation, <http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/asia-pacific/>

Renewed crackdown brings harsh sentences for CDP, Inside China Today, www.insidechina.com/news.php3?id=83774

3. Visit the Web site of the Chinese Embassy in London at www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/. According to this pro-China Web site, what are the benefits of China's system of government?

4. Conduct additional research on the Tiananmen Square massacre and prepare a report for your class. You may want to include some of the following information in your report: the demands and activities of the protesters, the response of the Chinese government, the response of the Chinese community, and the response of the international community.

5. Locate a copy of the News in Review video and resource guide for one of the following: China Today: A Correspondent's View (September 1994); The UN Women's Summit: Two Weeks In China (October 1995); International Trade: Selling Canada (March 1996); The Struggle For Taiwan: A Chinese Show of Force (May 1996); or Deng Xiao Ping: China at the Crossroads April 1997. After viewing and studying the video and print material, make a presentation to the class in which you explain why the presence of illegal Chinese migrants off our coast is a symptom of a larger issue.

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Chinese-Canadians

Chinese Boat People: Human Cargo

Our new Governor General, Adrienne Clarkson, is of Chinese descent and was born in Hong Kong. To many Chinese-Canadians her appointment as representative of the Canadian Head of State, the Queen, is a particularly significant achievement, given the way in which Chinese immigrants to Canada have been treated in the past. Many Canadians of Chinese descent, however, have mixed feelings about the recent arrival of Chinese migrants on British Columbia's shores. On the one hand, they understand the desire to flee a life of economic hardship and limited personal freedom. On the other hand, some fear the arrival of these migrants will result in a backlash against the Chinese-Canadian community in general. The vast majority of Chinese-Canadians entered the country legally and have been productive, hard-working members of Canadian society, despite the fact that their ancestors faced very serious discrimination in Canada over the years.

As you read the following information, make written notes of discriminatory attitudes and laws that Chinese-Canadians faced in this country. What relevance, if any, do you feel this historical information has to the current story about illegal migrants?

A Cheap Pool of Labour

Chinese immigrants first became in demand after slavery was abolished in the United States. Wealthy farmers and businessmen in the United States found that poor, landless Chinese men from Guangdong and Fujian provinces could be convinced to move to the U.S. to do the hard, back-breaking

work that used to be done by African slaves. Some of these Chinese men immigrated to Canada when gold was found in British Columbia's Fraser River Valley in 1858. These Chinese prospectors moved north to Canada in hopes of making more money than they were earning in the U.S. Once here, the Chinese found that they were only allowed to mine after the white prospectors had extracted as much gold as they wanted from the mines. Not surprisingly, there was very little gold left when the Chinese finally were allowed access to the mines. However, by 1860, other Chinese had begun arriving in British Columbia directly from China.

Railway Workers

In addition to seeking gold, 17 000 Chinese men also found work building the western section of the Canadian Pacific Railway. This was extremely difficult and dangerous work. Tunnels had to be blasted through the mountains, and railway track had to be laid down high above many rivers and gorges. The arduous work involved huge amounts of rock being moved by hand, and the Chinese began to be known as coolies (bitter strength). In all, over 700 Chinese men lost their lives building the railway. And sadly, the Chinese workers were only paid half as much as white workers doing the same job. The only other work that the Chinese were allowed to do at this time was to work as cooks and launderers. This work was seen as women's work, and therefore was poorly paid; and it did not threaten the white male workers.

Although the Chinese were tolerated in Canada when their labour was in demand, as soon as the railway was completed in 1885 the Chinese were mistreated to an even greater extent. Thousands of labourers were laid off from the railway, and the Canadian government imposed a \$500 head tax on any Chinese person wanting to enter Canada. The Chinese were the only ethnic group that had to pay such a tax.

Soldiers In Transit

In the first half of the 20th century the Chinese faced continued discrimination. During the First World War, close to 80 000 Chinese soldiers were transported from China to B.C. and then sent across Canada and finally to the trenches of France. It turned out that China had made a deal with its Western allies to provide men for the allied war effort. When the men were returned to China by the same route at the conclusion of the war, they were transported in sealed railway cars to prevent them from sneaking into Canada and avoiding the \$500 head tax.

Years of Humiliation

Conditions did not improve for Chinese-Canadians following the First World War. On July 1, 1923, the Canadian government passed The Chinese Exclusion Act, which prevented any further Chinese immigration to Canada. With the passing of this act, the Chinese became the only people that Canada specifically excluded on the basis of race. During the next 25 years more and more laws against the Chinese were passed. Most jobs were closed to Chinese men and women, so many Chinese opened their own restaurant and laundry businesses. In British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Ontario, Chinese employers were not allowed to hire white females, so most Chinese businesses became Chinese-only.

During the Great Depression, life was even tougher for the Chinese than it was for other Canadians. In Alberta, for example, Chinese-Canadians received relief payments of less than half the amount paid to other Canadians. And because The Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited any additional immigration from China, the Chinese men who had arrived earlier had to face these hardships alone, without the companionship of their wives and children. Census data from 1931 shows that there were 1240 men to every 100 women in Chinese-Canadian communities. To protest The Chinese Exclusion Act, Chinese-Canadians closed their businesses and boycotted Dominion Day celebrations every July 1st, which became known as Humiliation Day by the Chinese-Canadians.

Canada was slow to lift the restrictions against the Chinese-Canadians and grant them full rights as Canadian citizens. Because Canada signed the United Nations Charter of Human Rights at the conclusion of the Second World War, the Canadian government had to repeal The Chinese Exclusion Act, which contravened the UN Charter. In that same year, 1947, Chinese-Canadians were finally granted the right to vote in federal elections. But it took another 20 years, until the points system was adopted for selecting immigrants, that the Chinese began to be admitted under the same criteria as any other applicants.

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Discussion, Research, and Essay Questions

Chinese Boat People: Human Cargo

1. In the August 23, 1999, issue of Maclean's magazine, William Bauer, former ambassador and member of the Immigration and Refugee Board, and Irving Abella, York University professor and current president of the Canadian Historical Society, wrote articles reflecting on what should be done about the Chinese migrants, and Canada's refugee and immigration laws in general. Review the two opinions, and then create your own list of changes that you believe could be made to Canada's laws to protect the rights of needy refugees, and yet protect Canada's sovereignty. If you cannot locate the actual magazine in your school library, visit Maclean's Web site at www.macleans.ca.

2. In John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Joad family is forced to leave the family farm in Oklahoma and migrate to California in search of a better life. The story, set during the time of the Great Depression, chronicles the hunger for food, work, and humanity that faced the migrants in the U.S. then, and that faces the dispossessed everywhere. Read the novel or watch the film version and prepare a report on what you have learned about the conditions facing internal migrants. Why is it important to remember that migration is also a domestic issue? Can you give examples of internal migration in Canada that has occurred because of lack of opportunity?

3. Although a great deal of media coverage occurred as a result of the boatloads of Chinese migrants that arrived on the shores of British Columbia in the summer of 1999, those migrants really

represent only a small fraction of the approximately 100 people who claim refugee status at Canadian airports, at U.S. border crossings, and at immigration offices across Canada every day. Yet because these Chinese migrants arrived in groups and in precarious conditions, they sparked debate and discussion across Canada. Conduct additional research on the conditions that exist in one of the countries that has been designated a refugee country by the United Nations. You can examine information from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at www.unhcr.ch/html/. Somalia, Afghanistan, and Myanmar (Burma) are examples.

4. One of the passengers on the second vessel that arrived in Canada in August 1999 was a dog. The dog was placed in a Victoria animal shelter. Almost immediately, the shelter was inundated with calls from across the country from people wanting to adopt the dog, named Breeze. As well, a number of people were calling the shelter daily simply for updates on the dog's condition. In contrast, the people aboard the same boat were greeted by protesters, and angry calls to radio phone-in shows demanded they be sent home. Discuss the significance of this information.

5. One newspaper headline stated, Migrants bill nears \$1-million. Another said, Migrant boats are boon to B.C. capital. The one article claimed that we cannot afford to admit more refugees because of the costs to the Canadian welfare system, legal system, and armed forces budgets. But the other article claimed the arrival of the migrants provides jobs: food had to be prepared by local restaurants, bus companies make money from increased transportation business, and hotels make money from the reporters and government officials who are brought to the area. To what extent do you think costs are a major issue in this news story?

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