

Message to our Readers

NATIONS ARE COMPLICATED and so are our feelings about them. Canada has a long history of repression, exclusion, and exploitation. But Canada is also a diverse country made of the labour, ideas, and cultures we all contribute.

Canada is built on Indigenous land. For 400 years, non-Indigenous people—first French, then English, then Canadian—have claimed it. Some newcomers to Canada have been welcomed and respected, while others have been banned, marginalized, and made to feel unwelcome. And Canada is still a colonial society. It is a “constitutional monarchy” with images of the British Queen on its money—and recently reinstalled in government offices abroad.

The Canadian government requires a long list of things from people who are applying for citizenship, including a test of their knowledge of Canada. But much of the “Canada” on which this test is based reflects a nationalistic, militaristic, and racist view of Canada and its history.

This guide is about a different kind of Canadian identity, one you won’t find in the official version. Canadians have long questioned what Canada is and what it can and should be. Indigenous people have resisted the Canadian state, French Canadians have articulated their own version of Canada, and women, workers, and immigrants have all fought to make Canada more just and more equitable.

Although we believe this guide gives a more accurate and honest account of Canada, we do not suggest it is the one “correct” version. It was written by a group of people from particular backgrounds, with differing perspectives, with more

Immigrants arriving at Winnipeg Station, ca. 1909



knowledge about some things and less about others. Unlike the Canadian government, we do not wish to enforce a monolithic view of Canada that excludes whatever facts and experiences complicate its nostalgia for a simple past that never really was. Above all, this guide is meant to challenge the current government's approach, and instead encourage everyone to question what it means to be a citizen of Canada.

Just to be clear, this guide will not help anyone pass the test to really become a citizen of Canada. For that, you should visit the website of Citizenship and Immigration Canada at <www.cic.bc.ca>