

**FYI**

Anti-German feeling ran high during World War I. At the beginning of the war, Berlin, Ontario, was home to many people of German descent. The city was named after the capital of Germany. During the war, the city officially changed its name to Kitchener, after a British military hero.



▲ **Figure 1.27** These young black men were members of the No. 2 Construction Battalion. One of their jobs was to transport ammunition. They were not allowed to use weapons even though they worked at the front lines. All their officers were white.

**FOCUS ON People's Rights**

**Is the government ever justified in taking away people's rights?**

When World War I began, the background of most Canadians was either British or French. At the best of times, people from other backgrounds were often treated as less than equal. During World War I, this treatment became even worse.

The rights of many Canadians were taken away during World War I. Some people argued that the government's actions were justified to protect Canada during a time of war. Others said that the actions were a form of racism.

**Aboriginal Peoples**

At first, Aboriginal people were barred from joining the army. Recruiters sometimes disguised this prejudice as concern for their welfare. They said that the enemy would think Aboriginal people were savages and mistreat them.

Things changed in 1915, when the government needed more troops. Suddenly, Aboriginal people were welcomed into the army. Once this happened, nearly all the able-bodied men from many First Nations signed up. Many fought bravely and earned medals for their contributions.

**Black Canadians**

Many white officers believed that black men would make poor soldiers who would not be accepted by white soldiers. As a result, black Canadians who tried to volunteer were usually turned away — unless their skin was very light-coloured.

When black people protested this unfair treatment, the army created a separate unit for black men: the No. 2 Construction Battalion. Members of this battalion were given the job of digging trenches and building roads.

By the end of the war, about 1000 black Canadians had served overseas, but their efforts were rarely recognized.

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## German and Ukrainian Canadians

In 1914, more than a million people from Germany and Austria-Hungary lived in Canada. Many Canadians feared that some of these immigrants from enemy countries might be spies.

As a result, people from these countries were labelled **enemy aliens**. Enemy aliens were required to carry identification papers and report their movements to the police, and many lost the right to vote.

Because of people's fears, the government forced more than 8000 Germans and Ukrainians into internment camps, which were like prisons. Ukrainians were included because Ukraine was part of Austria-Hungary at the time.

## Asian Canadians

Like some other groups, Asian Canadians faced prejudice before World War I. Neither Chinese nor Japanese Canadians were allowed to vote, for example.

Even though China and Japan joined the Allies, Asian Canadians were barred from joining the army. Still, some battalions did accept a few Chinese and Japanese Canadians.

### SHOW YOU KNOW

1. Create a chart like the one on the right. In the first column, fill in the names of the groups of people whose rights were taken away during the war. Then fill in the rest of the chart.
2. Today, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms allows the government to restrict the rights of some people if this "can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society." Select a group whose rights were restricted during World War I. Would the Charter allow the government to do the same thing today? Explain the reasons for your answer.

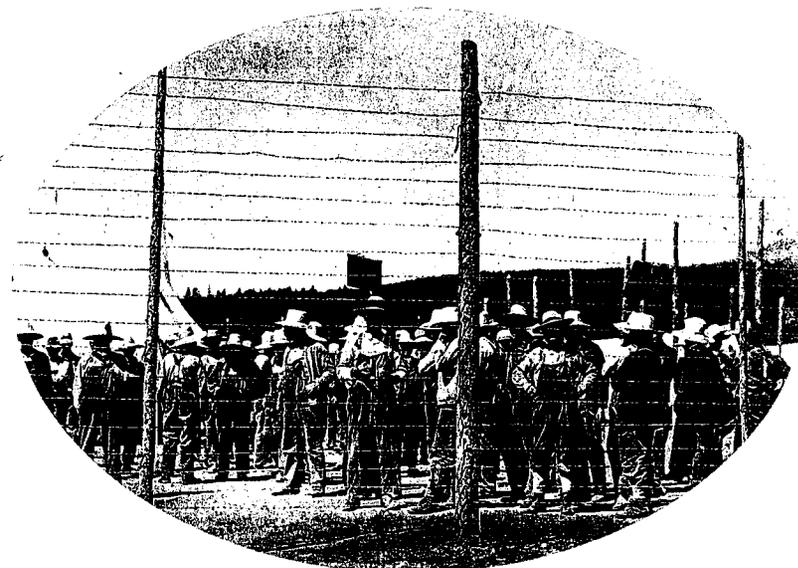
someone from an enemy country

"alien" — someone who is different or foreign

**enemy alien**

someone who was treated as less than equal

someone whose rights were taken away



▲ **Figure 1.28** Armed guards ensured that none of the Germans and Ukrainians interned at Castle Mountain Internment Camp in Alberta escaped.

Group	How Were Their Rights Restricted?	What Reason Was Given for Restricting Their Rights?