

HUGH JOHNSTON. — *The Voyage of the Komagatu Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979. Pp. 162.

*The Voyage of the Komagatu Maru* depicts an epic drama, replete with courageous Sikh nationalists, arrogant and ruthless British imperial officials, opportunistic and callous Canadian politicians and a British Columbia white population easily roused into a pogrom mentality. The harsh treatment of the 400 Sikh passengers of the *Komagatu Maru* who vainly attempted, between 23 May and 24 July 1914, to gain entry to Canada has been told many times. It has never been told so well.

In presenting this fascinating account, Professor Johnston, who has worked in Canada, India and Great Britain, utilizes a variety of documentary sources and interviews. The economic, physical and psychological hardships which these Sikh migrants encountered are discussed with sensitivity; to his credit Johnston's obvious sympathy with the Sikhs does not degenerate into a "bleeding heart" recitation of Canadian and British prejudice. Rather, there is an attempt to analyse the conditions in British Columbia in 1914 which made the province a very difficult place for Sikhs and other Asian immigrants. Johnston also does a masterful job in connecting the incident to the broader struggle for home rule in India. Indeed, he emphasizes the activities of a number of Sikh nationalists — most notably Gurdit Singh, the spiritual leader of the passengers — who sought to mobilize support for their movement among the Sikh communities in British Columbia and in the western coastal regions of the United States. In their efforts to use North America as a staging base for movements of political and social change in their homeland, Sikh nationalists were not alone: anti-Tsarist Russians, Irish republicans and Chinese supporters of Sun Yat-sen were also actively engaged in gathering funds, disseminating literature and planning uprisings in their respective countries.

Johnston effectively demonstrates that the *Komagatu Maru* incident was more than a confrontation over Canada's evolving "white only" immigration policy; in doing so he carries the story far beyond the dramatic departure of 24 July. Of equal importance, according to Johnston, was the attempt by the British authorities to arrest the organizers of the expedition when the *Komagatu Maru* docked near Calcutta in late September. A violent confrontation between government troops and the passengers produced a number of casualties on both sides; for the Sikhs, arrests, trials and executions soon followed. Gurdit Singh was among the fortunate, although he remained a fugitive until 1922 when he surrendered to the government police. Not surprisingly, his standing among Indian nationalists rose during his subsequent five-year imprisonment. Ironically, by this time Gurdit Singh had publicly embraced Gandhi's creed of non-violent protest.

The core of Johnston's book is the long battle of nerves between the leaders of the *Komagatu Maru* and Canadian officials in Vancouver. Johnston provides an excellent account of how Gurdit Singh was able to utilize the deep religious beliefs of the passengers in forging a collective will to resist the threats of both the Canadian and British governments. He also shows that there were determined men on the other side, none more formidable than William Charles Hopkinson. A former director of police in Calcutta, Hopkinson held the position of immigration inspector and interpreter in Vancouver between 1910 and 1914. He was not, however, the usual political appointee who sloppily and often dishonestly went through the motions of enforcing immigration regulations. Hopkinson was the eyes and ears of British counter-subversive intelligence, a vital link in that murky system which extended from the villages of the Punjab to the streets of Vancouver. Although Gurdit Singh and Hopkinson were protagonists in this struggle, they are both portrayed as men of integrity. In contrast, immigration officials such as Malcolm

Reid and British Columbia politicians such as Harry H. Stevens are exposed as incompetent and racist; Prime Minister Borden and the Immigration Branch hierarchy do not fare much better.

Johnston tells a gripping story and for the most part is judicious in his interpretation. There are, however, some important questions that remain unanswered. Were, for example, the "illiterate and helpless" passengers of the *Komagatu Maru* really that committed to the goals of Gurdit Singh and other Sikh nationalists? Or were they merely used, and in a way contrary to their best interests? Johnston obviously believes that the confrontation strategy was necessary and he tends to dismiss the moderates within Vancouver's Sikh community who sought to find a compromise; indeed, in their response to Canadian immigration officials they are said to have displayed "servility, pessimism and indifference" (p. 14). But was the only option the "affirmative action" approach of Gurdit Singh and the revolutionary *Ghadr* (Mutiny) Party; and did "affirmative action" mean the use of force? Unfortunately, this crucial debate, which Gandhi so dominated, receives little attention. Johnston might also have continued his analysis of the attempts by British and Canadian security services to detect Sikh revolutionaries during World War I. A recent article on the security operations of the Royal North West Mounted Police has demonstrated that, after Hopkinson's assassination, Malcolm Reid did not merely disappear into "an upstairs office in the Vancouver building" (p. 129); rather, he continued to exert a powerful influence on security matters until the end of the war. These small criticisms do not diminish the high quality of Professor Johnston's book. At last many of the misconceptions about the *Komagatu Maru* incident can be safely laid to rest.

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ALAN F. J. ARTIBISE and GILBERT A. STELTER, eds. — *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1979. Pp. iv, 383.

ALAN F. J. ARTIBISE and GILBERT STELTER. — *Canada's Urban Past. A Bibliography to 1980 and Guide to Canadian Urban Studies*. Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 1981. Pp. xl, 396.

Canada's urban past has the makings of a history. This increasingly popular view is espoused by Artibise and Stelter in their sustained enterprise as editors and compilers of a lengthening series of volumes. In organizing and presenting the work of numerous scholars from various disciplines they encourage such thinking and invite consideration of how the interpretive task is served by their efforts. The two books which are the focus of this review comprise a collection of previously unpublished essays and a substantial bibliography supplemented by a guide to some major archival collections and sources.

Three themes make up the declared foci of the thirteen chapters and editorial introduction of *The Usable Urban Past*: the economic framework; politics and municipal government; and planning and the development process. The coverage is unequal in scale, one essay being devoted to the first theme, five to the second and seven to the third. Hence the subtitle, *Planning and Politics in the Modern City*. In the one essay, given pride of place, devoted to the economic framework within