



Grades: 5-12

Courses

- British Columbia History
- Canadian History
- British North American Colonial History
- Aboriginal History in British Columbia

Key Topics

- James Douglas "Father of British Columbia"
- Important events in the historical development of British Columbia
- Analysis of primary and secondary sources

Credits

Author: Lindsay Gibson

Editors: Roland Case, John Lutz and Jenny Clayton

Historical Researcher: Jenny Clayton, PhD, Department of History, University of Victoria

Developed by: The Critical Thinking Consortium (TC²)
www.tc2.ca

Did Governor James Douglas Deserve to be Knighted?

All support materials for this curriculum challenge in one PDF (large download).

Primary and Secondary Documents

- #6 Core Documents: the Murder of Peter Brown (7 documents) (PDF)
- #7 Core Documents: the Shooting of Thomas Williams (6 documents) (PDF)
- #8 Core Documents: the Fraser River War (5 documents) (PDF)

Background Information

- #2 Overview of the Murder of Peter Brown (PDF)
- #3 Overview of the Shooting of Thomas Williams (PDF)
- #4 Overview of the Fraser River War (PDF)

Activity Sheets

- #1 Sample: Positive and Negative Aspects of Douglas' Life (PDF)
- #5 Investigating the Incident (PDF)
- #9 Reading Around a Document (PDF)
- #10 Evidence of Douglas' Behaviour (PDF)
- #11 Sample: Evidence of Douglas' Behaviour (PDF)
- #12 Rating Douglas' Worthiness (PDF)

Assessment Rubrics

- #13 Assessing the Evidence (PDF)
- #14 Assessing the Report (PDF)

CURRICULUM CHALLENGES

- What Were the Real Reasons for Creating the Colony of British Columbia?
- Were the Douglas Treaties and the Numbered Treaties Fairly Negotiated?
- Did the Gold Rush Radically Change Daily Life in Victoria?
- Did Governor James Douglas Deserve to be Knighted?

Included:

- Primary and Secondary Documents: #8 Core Documents
- Background Information: #3 Overview of the Fraser River War

Core Documents: The Fraser River War

Document #1: Overview of Douglas' actions

Historian, retired museum studies professor and manager for BC Heritage John Adams has published several history books including "*Old Square-Toes...*" which he had been researching for ten years.

"Although Douglas' actions with respect to administration during the gold rush were vindicated [justified] in the end, the situation almost turned the other way. In August 1858 the governor of Vancouver Island had no legal or effective control over the formation of the quasi-military [miners] companies, comprised [made up] mostly of Americans, which waged war in the Fraser Canyon with native people. These companies negotiated at least ten 'treaties' with the aboriginal population, unsanctioned [not supported] by the British Crown. Although his authority had temporarily been usurped [taken], Douglas went to Yale in September and exhorted [urged] the American miners to obey the laws of Britain and 'pay the Queen's dues like honest men.'"

Source: John Adams, *Old Square-Toes and his Lady: The Life of James and Amelia Douglas*. (Victoria, BC: Horsdal & Schubart Publishers, 2001), pp. 123-124.

Document #2: Protecting Native people from American miners

Governor James Douglas describes the potential for war between the miners and the Aboriginals in a despatch sent to the British Colonial Office.

"... there is much reason to fear that serious affrays [bloody struggles] may take place between the natives and the motley adventurers [miners from many countries], who will be attracted by the reputed wealth of the country, from the United States possessions in Oregon, and may probably attempt to overpower the opposition of the natives by force of arms, and thus endanger the peace of the country.

I beg to submit, if in that case, it may not become a question whether the Natives are entitled to the protection of Her Majesty's Government; and if an officer invested with the requisite authority should not, without delay, be appointed for that purpose."

Source: Despatch to London, Douglas to Labouchere, 8657, CO 305/8, p. 108; received 18 September, No. 22, Victoria Vancouver's Island, 15th July 1857.

Document #3: Douglas' investigation

Donald Fraser was the Pacific Coast correspondent for the *London Times* and reported from the Fraser Canyon following the conflict that took place.

“The Governor is engaged endeavouring to trace the murders committed on the river. The information received goes to implicate white men. Indians complain that the whites abuse them sadly, take their squaws away, shoot their children, and take their salmon by force. . . .

A village orator appeals to the Governor for relief against the miners, who are intruding upon the Indian domain. The poor creatures! They were very modest in their demand. They only asked for a small spot to draw up their canoes, and to dry their fish upon, to be exempted from mining. Their request was granted by the Governor, and the boundaries marked by the sub-commissioner.”

Source: Donald Fraser to *The Times* (London), 1 December 1858, p. 10. cited in G.P.V. Akrigg and Helen B. Akrigg, *British Columbia Chronicle, 1847-1871: Gold & Colonists*. (Vancouver, BC: Discovery Press, 1977), pp. 131-132.

Document #4: Douglas takes action to settle peace

University of British Columbia professors, G.P.V. and Helen Akrigg, wrote two widely-used B.C. histories, and they self-published a bestselling book, *1001 British Columbia Place Names*.

“On September 20th, having completed his investigation and satisfied himself that the peace was no longer in danger, Douglas started back to Victoria. From there, on October 12th, he wrote a report to Lytton, the Colonial Secretary, in London. Discreetly [wise in secrecy] he said hardly a word about the recent American-Indian ‘war’ fought on British soil. He did mention that there had been much unrest, which he attributed to the excessive use of liquor. He noted that he had enjoined [instructed] moderation in its use by the whites, and had prohibited [disallowed] its sale to the Indians. Further to moderate [reduce] the consumption of ‘rotgut’, he had set up for the saloons a licensing system which would cost them six hundred dollars each. At Hope he had found a number of persons wanting to settle on the land. He had ordered townsites laid out both at Hope and Yale and had arranged to the provisional occupancy of land, pending the establishment of a duly constituted government which could issue land titles... He mentioned that, in order to assure better governance for Yale, he had appointed a chief of police and five constables.”

Source: G.P.V. Akrigg and Helen B. Akrigg, *British Columbia Chronicle, 1847-1871:*

Gold &

Colonists. (Vancouver, BC: Discovery Press, 1977), pp. 130-133.

Document #5: Assessment of Douglas' response

University of Victoria historian Daniel Marshall has written several academic books and publications about British Columbia and Aboriginal history.

“In the contest over land and resources the Native peoples of the Fraser River corridor were finally overwhelmed by enormous numbers of miners and weaponry, their monopoly control of gold forfeited, their claim to the land marginalized through modern day. Douglas, in advance of any authority from London, took immediate action in the war's aftermath and established the basis for colonial administration through appointment of gold commissioners and justices of the peace. Yet his message to the ‘citizens of that great republic which like the mustard seed has grown into a mighty tree... that offshoot of England of which England is still proud’ spoke more of ingratiating oneself [gaining favour] to a foreign army of occupation [the American miners in the Fraser Canyon] than any attempt to arrest the illegal practices of miners. Douglas in his official communiqués [despatches] to London did little to mention that British sovereignty [authority] and had been undermined [taken over] by a foreign population [miners] that took the law into its own hands. Neither did he comment on the degree to which massacres had occurred. In the final analysis Douglas's fledgling [new], unconstituted [not established] colonial authority, consisting of a handful of officials, was terribly dwarfed by the tens of thousands of foreign adventurers who claimed the land.”

Source: Daniel P. Marshall, “No Parallel: American Miner-Soldiers at War with the Nlaka'pamux of the Canadian West,” in John M. Findlay and Ken S. Coates, ed., *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), pp. 64-65.

Overview of the Fraser River War

Lindsay Gibson is a former high school history teacher and Ph.D. student at the University of British Columbia where he studies in the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness.

The origins of the Fraser Canyon War can be traced to the 1850's when the Nlaka'pamux people of the Thompson and Fraser Rivers began selling gold to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). James Douglas wanted to keep the discovery of gold secret so that the HBC could profit from the gold trade, and to avoid the possibility of large numbers of American miners moving into the British-held mainland. Since the British had not formally colonized or populated the territory, Douglas worried that the United States would try to annex the land once American miners had moved in.

Douglas' worst fears came true in the mid-1850's when rumours of gold began to circulate and miners began to stream across the 49th parallel into the mainland. In July 1857, Nlaka'pamux people expelled gold miners because they were taking gold from their land, and because they worried that mining would have a negative effect on the annual salmon run that provided their principal food supply. In letters to the British Colonial Office Douglas expressed concern that the miners may try to attack and expel the Nlaka'pamux. Douglas urged the British government to take steps to establish its presence and authority in the region.

Between 1857-1858 between 25,000-30,000 Americans and Europeans poured into British Columbia from California and the Oregon Territory. As the miners gained more and more of a majority, they drove the Nlaka'pamux from the gold bars on the river. To the miners, the Fraser Canyon was an area inhabited by "savages" far beyond the reach and power of the government in Victoria. In June 1858 a conflict nearly erupted at Hill's Bar when a group of Nlaka'pamux outnumbered a group of miners and threatened to wipe them out. After visiting the area to investigate the conflict, Douglas concluded that the main cause was that the Nlaka'pamux were jealous of the large quantities of gold being taken by the miners from their territory.

To avoid further conflict, Douglas appointed two officials to represent the authority of the crown on the mainland. By July 1858 Yale was a lawless town of tents and shacks, with a population of 5,000 miners, traders, and gamblers. There were just three government officials in the Fraser Canyon: two revenue collectors and a justice of the peace at Hill's Bar. As a result, the miners managed themselves and their own dealings with Natives, organized meetings, elected officers on individual bars, and applied and administered their own rules.

Tension between First Nations groups and miners increased in July 1858. Twenty-five miners travelling through the Okanagan Valley to the Fraser Canyon stole and destroyed provisions at an Aboriginal camp, and then ambushed unarmed Aboriginals returning to camp the next day, killing an estimated 10-12 and injuring equally as many. The Nlaka'pamux had many problems with the miners harassing the women, trespassing on their land, excluding them from mining for gold,

destruction of their property, and overall mistreatment. The 1858 salmon run was significantly less than other years, which the Nlaka'pamux blamed on the mining operations.

The violence began when Nlaka'pamux sent downstream the headless bodies of two French miners who had allegedly attacked a Nlaka'pamux woman. The miners quickly organized six volunteer militias. Captain Snyder of the New York Pike Guard militia convinced the miners that the war should be one of pacification, not extermination. Snyder proposed using a large show of armed force to pressure the Nlaka'pamux into a peace settlement with the miners.

On August 9, the miners' militias left for Spuzzum where 3000 miners had set up camp after fleeing from the Nlaka'pamux. The militias began moving upstream and sent reports to the Nlaka'pamux at Lytton that they wanted to make peace. According to reports, on August 14 the miners fought hostile Nlaka'pamux, killing nine, wounding others, and taking three prisoners. As the troops were returning to Spuzzum, volunteer soldiers burned three Native villages. One miner reported that a company of miners found several Indian camps and "just killed everything, men, women, and children." The heaviest miner casualties may have occurred when miners camped out for the night panicked in the dark and began firing at each other.

Aboriginals from all over the upper Thompson assembled at Lytton to decide on their response to the miners militias. The Okanagan, Shuswap, Bonaparte, Savona and Kamloops bands promised to fight if war was declared. One of the chiefs named Spintlum made an eloquent speech that convinced many to pursue peace. If Spintlum had not urged peace it is probable that many First Nations from the Fraser Canyon and the interior might have gone to war.

Captain Snyder arrived at Lytton to meet with 27 chiefs gathered from throughout the traditional lands of the Nlaka'pamux. Snyder offered the chiefs an ultimatum: either accept peace or face the prospect of being driven from their lands. Some historians believe the chiefs had already decided to settle for peace before Snyder arrived. Snyder concluded several oral and written peace treaties with the chiefs representing over 2,000 Aboriginal people.

Although the British Government had created the Crown Colony of British Columbia on August 2, 1858, there was little formal government presence in the Fraser Canyon. After receiving reports about conflict in the Fraser Canyon, Douglas raised a force of 20 Royal Marines and 15 Royal Engineers. He set out from Victoria on August 30 and arrived at Yale on September 13.

Douglas immediately met with both Aboriginal people and miners to investigate the conflict. He reprimanded the miners for ignoring British law and authority in the region, but was assured by the miners that they would follow the Queen's law in the future. He met with the Nlaka'pamux and guaranteed them reserves in the Fraser Canyon and prohibited the sale of alcohol to all Aboriginal peoples. Douglas also ordered townsites to be drawn up for Yale and Hope, and appointed a chief of police and five constables. With his business in the Fraser Canyon complete, Douglas returned to Victoria on September 20.

Source: Lindsay Gibson, University of British Columbia, Unpublished account, February 2010.