

## Ceylon - Laborers



"Coolie" laborers from the gem mines in Ratnapura, Ceylon (Sri Lanka). A large group of mine workers are shown either sitting or squatting. Some workers are fully dressed and wearing turbans, but most are only wearing loincloths. One man is holding a strainer. Ratnapura is renowned for the variety and quality of gems produced from its quarries. The term "coolie" referred to unskilled, indentured laborers from India and China, and was often used as a racial slur. Having outlawed slavery, the British created the coolie system in 1842 in order to gain inexpensive labor for use in their colonies, including Sri Lanka. However, these workers were often exposed to harsh working and traveling conditions, and many thousands died. Eventually, the British outlawed the system in 1917, (1912).

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