

SECTION THREE

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

WORDS TO KNOW

refugee
nativism
permeated
anti-Semitism
fascist
unassimilable
Holocaust
latent
stringent
asylum
Final Solution

Canada, Immigration, and Jewish Refugees

① Discuss with a partner the difference between an immigrant and a refugee. Brainstorm a list of possible examples of refugees and immigrants that have been in the news recently. What is the significance of the difference between refugees and immigrants?

BEFORE READING

Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, and before long, his anti-Semitic policies began to unsettle Germany's Jewish population. By 1940, close to half of Germany's and Austria's Jewish people had fled to other countries.

The People's Views

Before you examine the evidence in Section Three, you may want to revisit Chapter One, Section Two, and Chapter Two, Section Three, to review the structure and attitudes of Canadian society prior to the 1930s.

- As you examine the evidence in this first half of Section Three (The People's View), consider whether you agree with historian David Rome's statement below. Be prepared to justify your conclusions.

The reluctance of the Canadian government to admit Jewish refugees in any great numbers was a fair reflection of public opinion ... which was a strong Anglo-Saxon nativism permeated with Anti-Semitism.

Source: David Rome, *Clouds in the Thirties: On Antisemitism in Canada, 1929-1939*, vol. 11 (Montreal: [the author], 1977), p. 510.

- Use a table like the one below to organize your evidence.

I read (what is the evidence saying?)	I think (how do I think it relates to the quotation?)	I wonder (what are the implications of this; how do I feel?)
Therefore... (my conclusions regarding the quotation on Canada's immigration policy)		

- As you read the evidence in this half of Section Three and the next (The Official View), gauge public opinion and the government's attitude toward the Jewish refugee crisis. Monitor your data by completing a table like the one below.

Evidence number	+ (For immigration)	- (Against immigration)	Justification (reasons)

DURING READING

Evidence 3.28

Commissioner Turner of the Salvation Army declared in a 1931 speech:

“I am sure you ... will want to give preference to British people, blood of your own blood, kin of your own kin, and by getting the right people into this country ... you will bring up the right kind of nation.”

Source: Address delivered before the Canadian Club of Toronto, 1931.

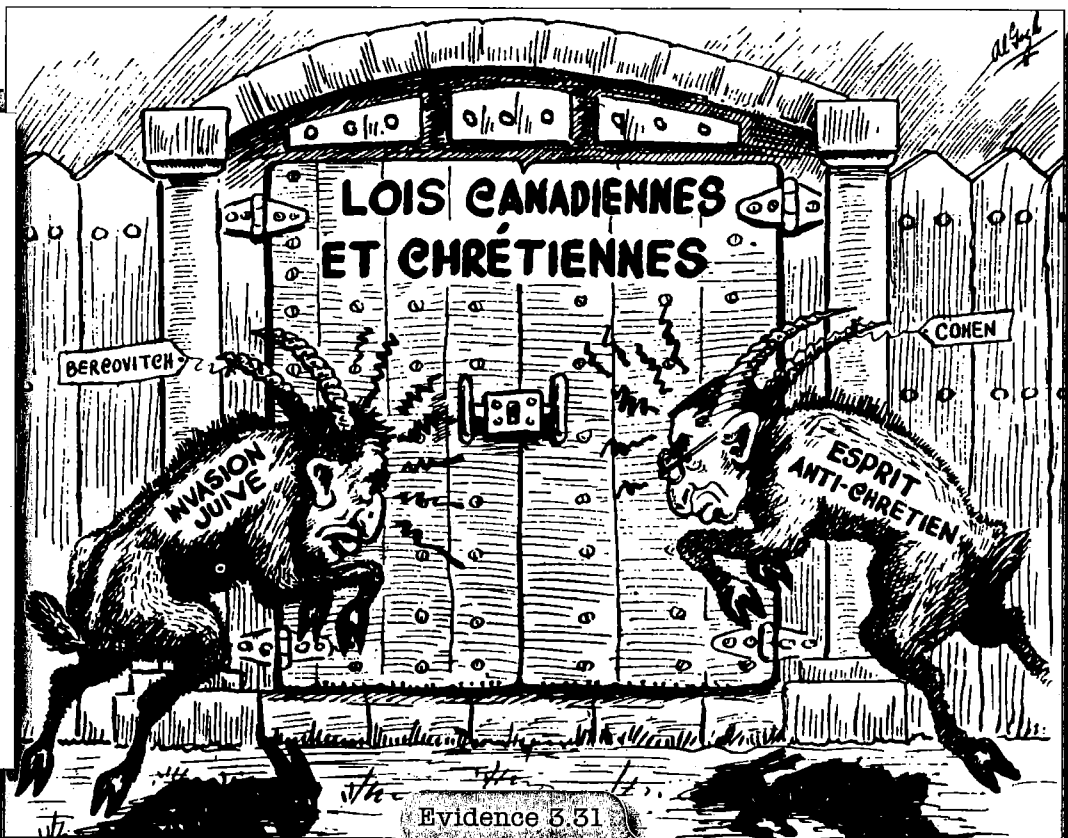
In Ontario, some Canadians were sympathetic to fascism. In 1933, a number of clubs preaching anti-Semitism, including the Toronto Swastika Club, were formed. These clubs were made up mainly of teenage boys and young men of British descent. The Toronto club's stated aim was to exclude from the Beach area of Toronto “all obnoxious and undesirable elements.”

In the West, also, some Canadians sympathized with fascism. William Whittaker, a former British soldier, launched the Nationalist Party on September 16, 1933. The party modelled itself on the *Sturmabteilung* (SA, early storm troopers), wearing khaki shirts and riding boots. The movement appealed to European immigrant groups, ex-soldiers, and those sympathetic to fascism. The party's journal, *The Canadian Nationalist*, was strongly anti-Semitic.

Evidence 3.29

During the 1932 session of the Quebec legislature, two Jewish MNAs, Peter Bercovitch and Joseph Cohen, introduced a libel bill known as the Bercovitch Bill, targeting Quebec fascist leader Adrien Arcand's anti-Semitic campaigns in nationalistic papers such as *Le Goglu*. This January 20, 1933 cartoon in *Le Goglu* attacked the Bercovitch Bill. The door reads: Canadian Laws and Christians. The goats attacking the door read: Jewish Invasion and Anti-Christian Feeling.

Are you surprised by the existence of such cartoons in a Canadian paper in 1933? Could such a cartoon be printed in a general newspaper today? Why or why not?



Evidence 3.30

The Ligue d'Action Nationale was a Quebec organization with fascist sympathies that reflected broader Quebec opinion. On June 5, 1933, the Ligue forwarded the following resolution to the federal government:

“That the Canadian borders be kept completely closed indefinitely in these days of general unemployment ... that the government of Canada remain perfectly inflexible before Jewish pressure of any kind ... which in itself cannot be an asset for Canada, being by its faith, its customs and its character unassimilable.”

Source: *L'Action Nationale*, vol. II (September 1933), p. 152.

Evidence 3.31

In 1934, the National Social Christian Party (Quebec Fascist Party) was established by Adrian Arcand. Arcand published propaganda against Jewish people. The party's paper, *Le Patriote*, had a regular Ottawa column. This column aroused the concern of the *Ottawa Citizen*. In an editorial, the paper stated:

“It is astonishing to find Canadian people lending themselves to ... racial animosity in this country. Canadian economic conditions are sufficiently deplorable without being made worse by internal strife based on nothing more than the colour of a man's hair or accident of birth into one religious faith or another.”

Source: *Ottawa Citizen*, March 8, 1935.

Evidence 3.32

The Mail and Empire.

VOL. LXII.

TORONTO, THURSDAY, AUGUST 17, 1933—EIGHTEEN PAGES.

NO. 19,187

SCORES HURT AS SWASTIKA MOBS RIOT AT WILLOWVALE MAYOR PROMISES IMMEDIATE PROBE OF DISTURBANCES

Thousands Caught Up in Park Melee—Gangs Wielding Lead Pipes and Bats Sweep Streets, Bludgeoning Victims

Mayor's Statement

Five Taken to Hospital, Others Nurse Gashes

Headline from the Toronto Mail and Empire, August 17, 1933.

What does the headline suggest about the newspaper's attitude toward the "swastika clubs"?

“Following *Kristallnacht* [‘night of broken glass,’ a planned series of violent acts against Jews throughout Germany] in November 1938, some public opinion took on a different tone. A crowd of more than 20 000 filled and overflowed into the streets surrounding Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto as part of a National Day of Mourning. Similar demonstrations were mounted across Canada (Winnipeg 4000; Quebec 200; Alberta 800; Niagara Falls 1200). Telegrams, petitions, and letters poured into the offices of the prime minister and government officials, calling for them to take action in favour of refugees.”

Source: *Toronto Daily Star*,
November 21, 1938.

Sign posted on Jackson's Point on Lake Simcoe, Ontario, 1938.

What does this sign suggest about the accuracy of Wilcox's observation in Evidence 3.34? Revisit his remarks when you have finished reading the next section (The Official View) about government responses.



In a speech at Convocation Hall, University of Toronto, March 21, 1939, C.E. Wilcox, of the United Church of Canada and founding member of the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Persecution (CNRC), condemned government inaction and opponents of admission of refugees:

“... we feel that Canada should share with other countries the responsibility of providing a haven for at least a reasonable number of refugees ...”

C.E. Wilcox, in his address delivered at the University of Toronto, also suggested that “perhaps the all-important reason for government inaction on accepting Jewish refugees, was ... the existence throughout Canada, but in some centres more manifest than in others, of a latent anti-Semitism.”

Source: C.E. Wilcox,
“Canadian Post
Mortem on Refugees,”
Social Welfare
vol. XVIII, no. 3
(March 1939), p. 78.

Not all Canadians changed their tone. *Le Devoir* questioned whether the events of *Kristallnacht* warranted action in Canada:

“If Germany has become the Jewish hell, is that a good reason for making Canada the Jewish paradise?”

(November 13, 1938)

The nationalistic St-Jean Baptiste Society in Quebec City presented a petition with 127 364 signatures to the House of Commons in early 1939 “vigorously protesting against all immigration whatsoever and especially Jewish immigration.”

Source: Petition to House of Commons,
Monday, January 30, 1939
(*House of Commons Debates*, 1 1939, p. 428).

1. If you were unemployed during the 1930s, how might you have felt about immigration? Would you have supported allowing Jewish refugees to come to Canada? Why or why not? Would your feelings have been different if you were employed? Remember the social attitudes of the 1930s, and the fact that no one anticipated the extent of the Holocaust to come.
2. What has changed in Canada and the world to influence how Canadians today look at the same issues discussed above? Think about immigration and refugees today. Have Canadian attitudes changed? Explain. (You may want to visit Chapter Seven, Section Four.)

The Official View: The Government, Government Officials, and the Jewish Refugee Crisis in Europe

Evidence 3.38

- In your own words, restate each part of the following document. Check your understanding with a partner.
- What conclusions can you draw about Canada's immigration policy in 1931?

Source: Order-in-Council, PC 695, March 21, 1931.

March 21, 1931

Order-in-Council

The Deputy of His Excellency in Council is further pleased, having regard for the unemployment conditions now temporarily existing in Canada, to make the following Regulations ...

From and after the 18th March, 1931, and until otherwise ordered, the landing in Canada of immigrants of all classes and occupations is hereby prohibited, except as hereinafter provided:

1. A British Subject entering Canada directly or indirectly, ... who has sufficient means to maintain himself until employment is secured;
2. A United States citizen entering Canada from the United States who has sufficient means ... ;
3. The wife or unmarried child under 18 years of age of any person legally admitted to and resident in Canada ... ;
4. An agriculturalist having sufficient means to farm in Canada.

DURING READING

As you examine the evidence in this second half of Section Three, ask yourself what responsibilities and duties Canada has today toward citizens from other countries who want to come here because of wars, persecution, and other threats in their native countries. Before answering, consider such factors as economic impact on Canada, humanitarian concerns, immigrants' adaptability to Canadian society, and Canada's international reputation.

Read the claim made in the quotation below. Using the evidence given, determine whether you think this statement is an accurate representation of Canada's immigration policy.

... what should be stressed is that the depression also afforded Canadian government officials a dramatic opportunity to complete a process of restriction begun in the boom years of the 1920s. Canadian immigration policy had always been self-serving. When economic necessity dictated the admission of non-British and non-American immigrants, it was always in descending order of ethnic preference.... At the bottom were Jews, Orientals and Blacks.

Source: Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2002), p. 5.

Given the evidence presented here, should the government of Canada have allowed a significant number of Jewish refugees to immigrate here in the 1930s? Be ready to explain your position.

Evidence 3.40

Evidence 3.39

On November 3, 1934, Prime Minister R.B. Bennett responded to a request made by the League of Nations High Commissioner for Canada to accept some Jewish refugees:

“We cannot, in fairness to our population, authorize the admission into Canada of a number of people who must either remain idle or take the places now filled by Canadians, or for which Canadians are waiting opportunity.”

Source: High Commissioner for Refugees Records, Box 5, Bennett to McDonald, November 3, 1934.

What was Prime Minister Bennett afraid of?



By 1936, Mackenzie King and the Liberals had replaced Prime Minister Bennett and the Conservatives as the government. King's deputy minister of immigration, Frederick Blair, was in charge of deciding who got into Canada. Here, Blair—who often expressed anti-Semitic views—is shown after he was given Canada's highest award for service to the country, 1943.

Should Canada be able to revoke awards when new, negative information is unearthed about the recipient?

⑥
What "internal problem" is King afraid of? What evidence from the previous section (The People's Views) might support his fears?

Evidence 3.41

While he was sympathetic to humanitarian concerns, King always considered national unity first and foremost. He wanted at all costs to avoid a division between French and English Canada, as had happened during the First World War. Following the announcement that an international conference would be convened in Evian, France to address the refugee crisis, King wrote in his diary:

“My own feeling is that nothing is to be gained by creating an internal problem in an effort to meet an international one. ... We must ... seek to keep this part of the Continent free from unrest and from too great an intermixture of foreign strains of blood. ... I fear we would have riots if we agreed to a policy that admitted a number of Jews.”

Source: W.L. Mackenzie King, *Diaries*, March 29, 1938.

Evidence 3.43

Following the events of *Kristallnacht* on November 10, 1938, King reflected in his diary:

“... the sorrows which the Jews have to bear at this time are almost beyond comprehension. ... I feel Canada must do her part in admitting some of the Jewish refugees. It is going to be difficult politically, and I may not be able to get the Cabinet to consent, but will fight for it as right and just, and Christian.”

Source: W.L. Mackenzie King, *Diaries*, November 13, 1938.

Evidence 3.42

Some members of the House of Commons opposed the government's position on Jewish refugees. Liberal MP Arthur Heaps summarized the feelings of these members in a letter to Prime Minister King:

“Immigration regulations in Canada are the most stringent in the world. They are inhuman and unchristian. ... We think it is not in keeping with good liberal doctrine to refuse the right of asylum to a limited number of political and religious refugees.”

Source: King Papers, Library and Archives Canada, A.A. Heaps to W.L. Mackenzie King, September 9, 1938.

Evidence 3.44

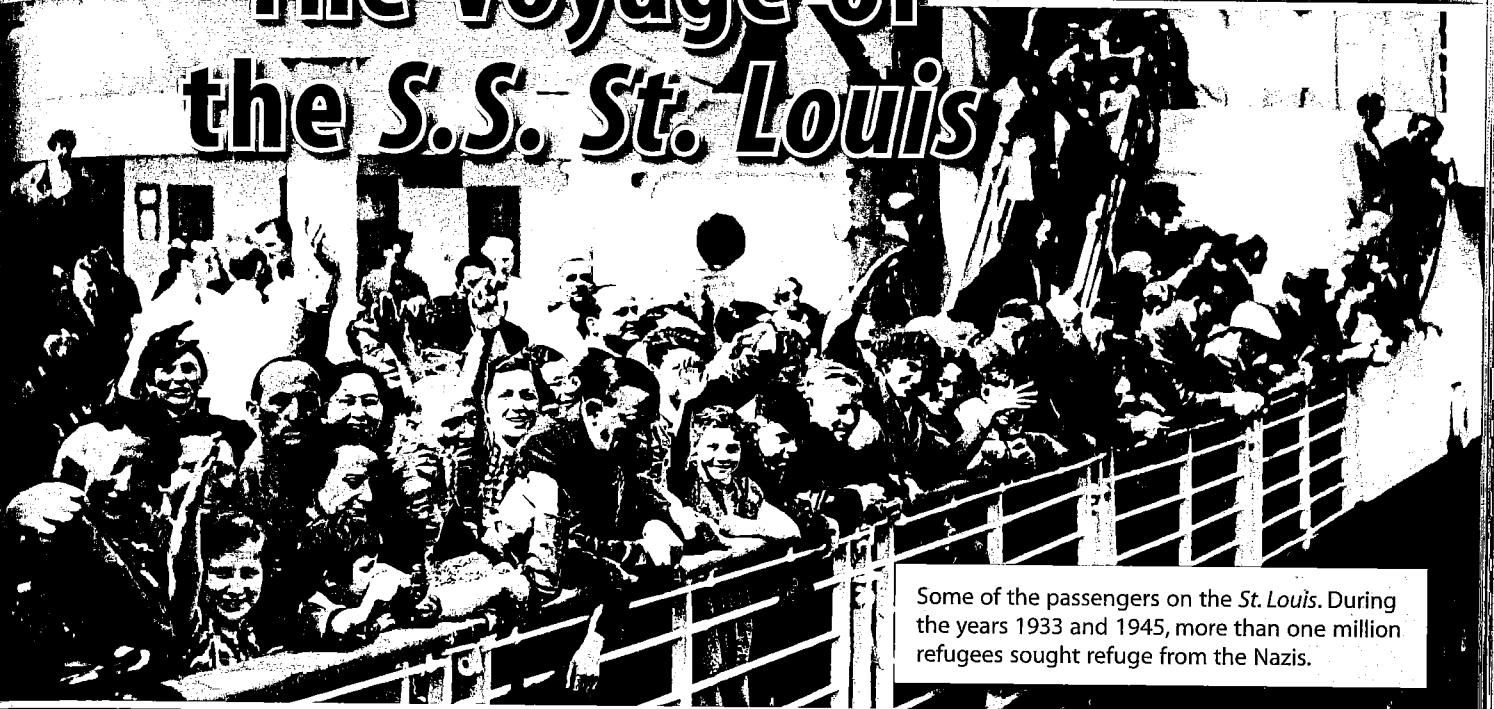
Secretary of State Ferdinand Rinfret best summarized the government's position in January 1939:

“Despite all sentiments of humanity, so long as Canada has an unemployment problem there will be no 'open door' for political refugees here ... [especially] that element who is assimilated with difficulty among the English and French of our Country.”

Source: *Montreal Gazette*, January 21, 1939.

The Voyage of the S.S. St. Louis

Evidence 5.45



Some of the passengers on the *St. Louis*. During the years 1933 and 1945, more than one million refugees sought refuge from the Nazis.

In May 1939, 937 passengers, mostly Jewish refugees, left Hamburg, Germany on the *S.S. St. Louis* en route to Cuba. Hundreds of children were among the refugees. All passengers held landing certificates permitting them entry to Cuba. But when the *St. Louis* reached the port of Havana, the president of Cuba refused to honour their documents. After the ship left Havana's harbour, it sailed so close to the Florida coast that the passengers could see the lights of Miami. The captain appealed for help, but in vain. US Coast Guard ships patrolled the waters to make sure that no one jumped to freedom. The ship was not allowed to dock in the United States. Nor was it allowed to dock in Canada. The *St. Louis* turned back to Europe, where Belgium, the Netherlands, England, and France admitted the passengers. But within months, German forces overran Western Europe, and hundreds of the passengers who had disembarked in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France eventually fell victim to the Nazi "Final Solution." (Source: Adapted from the United States Holocaust Museum Website.)

A distinguished list of Canadians sent a telegram to the prime minister on June 7, 1938, pleading the case of those on board the *St. Louis*. Among the petitioners were G.M. Wrong, professor; B.K. Sandwell, editor, *Saturday Night* magazine; Robert Falconer, past president of the University of Toronto; and Ellsworth Flavelle, a prominent businessman.

... we, the undersigned, as Christian citizens of Canada respectfully suggest that under the powers vested in you as Premier of our country you forthwith [sic] offer to the 907 homeless exiles on board the Hamburg American ship *St. Louis* [sic] Sanctuary in Canada.

When faced with the plight of the refugees on board the *St. Louis*, Prime Minister King, who was on a visit to Washington with the British royal family, deferred to the advice of his advisers and reflected in his diary:

... The question of immigrants on the ship "St. Louis" came up. ... It is much less our problem than that of the U.S. and Cuba.

Source: W.L. Mackenzie King, *Diaries*, June 8, 1939.

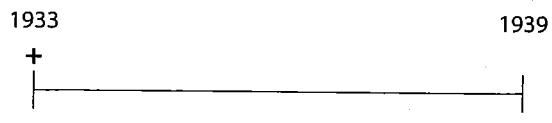
The Canadian Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, O.D. Skelton, also sent a telegram to King, responding to the appeal from the *St. Louis*. However, F.C. Blair stated the government's definitive position:

[No country could] ... open its doors wide enough to take in the hundreds of thousands of Jewish people who want to leave Europe: the line must be drawn somewhere.

Source: IR, File 644452, Blair to Skelton, Undersecretary of External Affairs, King's main foreign affairs adviser, June 8, 1939.

1. Organize a tag-team debate on the following question: *Be it resolved: The Canadian government was in a position to do more to address the plight of refugees from Europe.*
2. Imagine that you are a reporter at the Maple Leaf Gardens Rally on the National Day of Mourning (Evidence 3.33). Write a short newspaper report on the event.
3. Using the evidence presented in Section Three, put together a horizontal timeline like the one below, plotting public and government opinion. Place events favouring refugees above the line; place events against refugees below the line. Use two different colours to represent government and public opinion. The dates should progress chronologically from left to right.

Rating Scale: Government and Public Opinion on Jewish Refugees



AFTER READING

