

The Centre for Holocaust Education and Scholarship  
Teachers' Workshop 2017  
**Contextual Information**  
**"A Brief History of Canadian Immigration"**

**Pre-Confederation Immigration**

The first Jews arrived in what would become Canada in 1760 as members of a British regiment. They settled in Trois Rivieres, Quebec. Most of the early Jews that followed came from Western and Central Europe. They settled in Quebec (Lower Canada). In 1832, Lower Canada became the first jurisdiction in the British Empire to pass legislation that specifically accorded full rights to Jews.

**Post Confederation Immigration**

Following Confederation in 1867, attracting a large influx of immigrants became an urgent Federal Government priority: to boost the economy; to settle the west; to secure national sovereignty. The first Immigration Act 1869 declared an open door policy excluding only criminals but imposed impossible barriers on the sick and poor. In practice, Canada's immigration policy was ethnically selective favouring British and American immigrants followed by northern, then central Europeans. The least favoured were Asians, Blacks and Jews.

From 1869 to 1948 Canada took in over 100,000 children from the United Kingdom to be indentured farm workers or domestics servants. Only about 2% of these 'British Home Children' were homeless orphans. Most were from extremely poor single parent households. The children were promised a family, a home, food, clothing and an education. What they got was mostly harsh, abusive treatment and extremely hard work. By 1891 serious concerns were raised about the childrens' plight. The program continued right up to the 1970s.

During the 1880s thousands of Chinese Workers were allowed entry to build the Canadian Pacific Railway. Following completion in 1885 The Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act was passed. It restricted further Chinese immigration and imposed an exorbitant \$500.00 tax on each Chinese immigrant. In 1947, the Government removed the ban on Chinese immigration.

South Asians were excluded by the 'continuous voyage' policy restricting admittance if one could not reach Canada without stopping along the way.

Blacks were restricted on the basis that they could not tolerate Canada's harsh winters.

During World War 11 Japanese Canadians who tended to live on the west coast were removed from the homes and business and interned inland in work camps. In 1946, many

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were actually sent back to Japan.

Between 1880 and 1920 Canada received Jews from eastern Europe and Russia fleeing famine, poverty, increasing persecution and violent pogroms. Initially, they tended to settle in the Quebec Laurentians or on farms out west. Over time, they migrated to the major cities. The majority scratched out a living primarily in the textile industry or as peddlers.

### **Immigration And World War 1 (WW1)**

During WW1, the Government suspended all immigration from enemy nations - Germany, Austria and Hungary. People already in Canada from those countries were subjected to various restrictions under The War Measures Act, 1914 as 'enemy aliens'.

The Jews that came to Canada before and after WW1 had a more difficult time being accepted than the 18th century Jews. They spoke neither English nor French. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, mounting Nazism and increasingly right wing political ideologies caused more Canadians to view Jews negatively. Immigration policy continued to tighten after WW1 as Canada faced political and economic uncertainties with the rise of communism, organized labour movements and the Great Depression. In 1919 a new Immigration Act was introduced with powers to limit or exclude specific races or nationalities deemed undesirable.

### **Immigration And World War 11 (WW11)**

From 1924 until the end of WW11 Jewish entry was highly restricted. From 1921 to 1948 William Lyon Mackenzie King was Prime Minister and from 1936 to 1943 Frederick Charles Blair, a virulent antisemite was Director Of Immigration. The Prime Minister and his Liberal cabinet were responsible for the restrictive policy and Blair was responsible to enforce the restrictions.

On July 6, 1938 the United States convened 32 countries to Evian, France to discuss the issue of Jewish refugees. All the countries including Canada refused to accept any refugees.

In 1938, the S.S. St. Louis sailed from Hamburg with 907 Jewish refugees on board. After being turned away by Canada and other countries, the ship had no option but to return to Nazi Europe.

Kristallnacht (The Night Of The Broken Glass, November 9 & 10, 1938) marked the escalation of state orchestrated persecution against Jews in Germany, Austria and parts of

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Czechoslovakia. Shortly after a memo issued by Mackenzie King and Blair stated:

"We do not want to take too many Jews, but in present circumstances, we do not want to say so."

From 1905 to 1908 pogroms in eastern Europe were increasing in intensity and frequency against Jews. The Canadian Jewish Community lobbied the Government to establish a program to allow Jewish orphans to enter Canada. The Canadian Jewish Community would assume full responsibility. Jewish families would adopt the children. Reluctantly the Government agreed but events leading up to WW1 intervened. The program never got off the ground.

### **Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC)**

In 1919, the CJC was founded as a central organizing and lobbying group for the Canadian Jewish community. One of the CJC's first tasks was to assist WW1 Jewish refugees. Once that task was completed, the CJC was inactive until 1934 when it was revived to lobby the Government to open immigration to Jews. In 1938, after Kristallnacht the CJC pleaded with the Government to allow in Jews. In 1942 the CJC begged the Prime Minister to permit the rescue of 1,000 French Jewish children who were facing murder. All lobbying efforts were in vain. Canada's doors remained virtually closed to Jews during the Holocaust. In 1945 when a Canadian official was asked how many Jewish refugees Canada would admit, the infamous answer was: "None Is Too Many". Between 1933 and 1948, 5,000 to 8,000 Jewish refugees were admitted to Canada, the lowest number of any western country. For perspective, the City of Shanghai, China took in 25,000 Jewish refugees.

After WW11 Europe was overrun with Displaced Persons in Camps. Europe was pressuring Canada to allow in some refugees. Dynamic economic growth and changing societal attitudes did cause a shift. However this shift was slow to effect a change in immigration policy and practice. In February, 1947 the Prime Minister agreed to meet with the CJC on a Friday afternoon. The hope was the CJC would not attend as the Jewish Sabbath comes early in winter. The CJC did attend. The War Orphans Project was born. Canada would take in 500 Jewish children which later became 1,123; all costs were the responsibility of the Canadian Jewish community and the CJC had to obtain provincial agreement. The CJC's president travelled by train across the country obtaining provincial agreement and drumming up support in the Jewish communities along the way.

Each Jewish community decided independently how it was going to structure and fund the

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program. Both Toronto and Montreal created a temporary group house as the first stop while arrangements were being made for permanent homes for the children. In Winnipeg, the children went directly to homes, even if temporarily while a permanent adoptive family was arranged. Some communities funded the program on their own. Others received financial assistance from the CJC.

**Sources**

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