



Lesson 3:

The Escalation of Violence and Kristallnacht (the November Pogrom), and the International Response

Strands: Objectives:

A1 and A2 Students will be able to:

C3

- Understand Kristallnacht (the November Pogrom) as a culmination of a trajectory of repressive laws and increasing persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany
- Explain why Kristallnacht (the November Pogrom) marked a turning point in the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany
- Analyze primary and secondary sources to draw evidence-based historical conclusions

Lesson Preparation

This lesson is part of a six-lesson unit designed to help students understand the Holocaust as the result of escalating policies, attitudes, and actions over time rather than as a singular event, while also examining its consequences and legacy. When taught as a standalone lesson, additional background instruction or research may be required to provide students with the necessary historical context.

Lesson

1. What was Kristallnacht and why is it significant?

*Name clarification: Kristallnacht means “Night of the Broken Glass.” It is a reference to the shattered windows of Jewish-owned shops that were vandalized by groups of Nazis across Germany. However, in recent years, historians have perceived Kristallnacht as euphemistic. Some argue that The November Pogrom should be used instead, as pogrom came to be known historically as violent attacks, usually planned at the local level, on the Jewish population (if this lesson was followed by lessons 1 and 2, less info will be needed re: pogroms). Other historians, moreover, argue that even the term Pogrom is misleading, since it implies a spontaneous movement. Although it was intended to mimic an unplanned violent outburst, the November Pogrom was planned and executed by the Nazi government on the night of November 9th, 1938. **Note for teacher: this is a good opportunity to discuss historiography and the importance of contemplating different historiographical schools of thought.***

What it was:

- Systematic desecration of Jewish property, including houses, apartments, synagogues, and shops. Jewish communities were forced to pay for the damage.

- At least 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and deported to concentration camps, and over 90 Jews were killed.
- Many Jews were sent to Dachau, the first Nazi concentration camp.

Figure 1: "Shop Damaged during Kristallnacht," November 10, 1938. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



Figure 2: "The 'Kahal Adat Israel' Synagogue, known as the Schiffschul, going up in flames during the Kristallnacht pogrom." November 10, 1938. Yad Vashem.



Figure 3: "Grumach Family Tallits." 1938. Photographs taken 2016. Centre for Holocaust Education and Scholarship, Virtual Holocaust Museum.



Name of the exhibit: The Grumach Family Tallits

Description: Les's family owned a timber mill in Königsberg (East Prussia, Germany, today Russia). With the rise of Hitler, they were forced to sell their business and they moved to Berlin in 1936, where there was a larger Jewish community. Les's grandfather realized that nowhere in Germany was safe for Jews, so they applied to move to Australia. During their time in Berlin, Les's father was barmitzvahed and received his tallit. On Kristallnacht their synagogue was burned. A few days later he went into the shul to rescue the tallits. A few years later they received a visa and left Germany. Les's father always wore his burned tallit with pride.

Listen to Tova Clark's survival testimony (4:45-8:00):

<https://chesatottawa.ca/ottawa-holocaust-survivors-testimonials-full-length/>

- **Key topics:**

- Aryanization, the escalating exclusion of Jews from German society, and legal restrictions under the Nazi regime.

2. Why wasn't anywhere in Germany safe for Jews?

Great opportunity to either review material from previous classes (rise of antisemitism, propaganda, Nuremberg Laws, etc., or to provide an overview of Nuremberg Laws). The main points are:

- These laws turned Antisemitism and racist ideology into official government policies.
- They were enacted at the national level.
- Talk about 3 pillars of Nazi dictatorship: terror, propaganda, popular appeal.

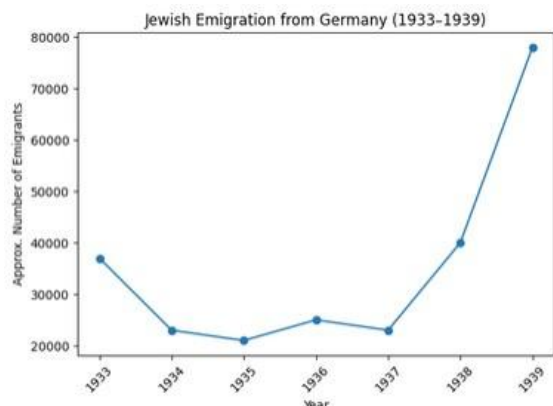
3. Did Jews try to leave Germany? What was the international response?

*This can either be taught as a lead-in to the next lesson (**Fleeing and International Response**), or as a standalone lesson. If taught as a standalone, explain that Jews had already been attempting to leave Germany before Kristallnacht and highlight the significant challenges they faced, including increasingly restricted borders and limited opportunities for refuge. Make a brief reference to the Évian Conference, and emphasize the Canadian response. If time is limited, the Évian Conference can be treated as an optional extension.*

- **Key topics:**

- Jewish emigration from Nazi Germany, barriers to emigration and international immigration restrictions, financial, legal, and family-related obstacles to emigration, changing patterns of Jewish emigration, 1933-1938, increased demand for emigration following Kristallnacht.

Figure 4: Graph showing Jewish emigration from Germany, 1933-1939.



- Graph analysis: Identify patterns, and brainstorm possible explanations for these changes.

Optional Content

If time does not permit, skip this section and move directly to Canada's response:

Figure 5: Primary Source from Évian Conference:

Excerpt from: Proceedings of the Intergovernmental Committee, Evian, July 6th to 15th, 1938. Record of the Plenary Meetings of the Committee. Resolutions and Reports, London, July 1938.

Having met at Evian, France, from July 6th to July 13th, 1938:

1. Considering that the question of involuntary emigration has assumed major proportions and that the fate of the unfortunate people affected has become a problem for intergovernmental deliberation;
2. Aware that the involuntary emigration of large numbers of people, of different creeds, economic conditions, professions and trades, from the country or countries where they have been established, is disturbing to the general economy, since these persons are obliged to seek refuge, either temporarily or permanently, in other countries at a time when there is serious unemployment; that, in consequence, countries of refuge and settlement are faced with problems, not only of an economic and social nature, but also of public order, and that there is a severe strain on the administrative facilities and absorptive capacities of the receiving countries;
3. Aware, moreover, that the involuntary emigration of people in large numbers has become so great that it renders racial and religious problems more acute, increases international unrest, and may hinder seriously the processes of appeasement in international relations;

[...]

Recommends:

8. a) That the persons coming within the scope of the activity of the Intergovernmental Committee shall be 1) persons who have not already left their country of origin (Germany, including Austria), but who must emigrate on account of their political opinion, religious beliefs or racial origin, and 2) persons as defined in 1) who have already left their country of origin and who have not yet established themselves permanently elsewhere;
- b) That the Governments participating in the Intergovernmental Committee shall continue to furnish the Committee for its strictly confidential information, with 1) details regarding such immigrants as each Government may be prepared to receive under its existing laws and practices and 2) details of these laws and practices;
- c) That in view of the fact that the countries of refuge and settlement are entitled to take into account the economic and social adaptability of immigrants, these should in many cases be required to accept, at least for a time, changed conditions of living in the countries of settlement;
- d) That the Governments of the countries of refuge and settlement should not assume any obligations for the financing of involuntary emigration;

*Évian Conference, France
(July, 1938).*

- *Delegates from thirty-two countries met to discuss the refugee crisis.*
- *Leaders expressed sympathy for the refugees, but no clear guidelines for welcoming larger numbers into their countries.*

4. What was Canada's response?

- **Key topics:**
 - Canada's restrictive immigration policies, the impact of the Great Depression, antisemitism in Canadian society and government, Canada's response to Jewish refugees, economic and ideological barriers to refugee admission.

Sources:

Figure 6: The cartoon portrays Jewish students carrying signs reading "Christians pay for the Jews!" and "The university is ours." Its title reads: "The invasion of the university by the Youpins still continues." "Youpins" is a derogatory term for Jews. The cartoon was published in the National Socialist Christian Party's publication, *Le Goglu*, on 9 September 1933, in Quebec.



Figure 7: “Two People on Skis in Front of a Synagogue with Swastikas Painted on It,” Sainte-Marguerite, Quebec, 1938. Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, file no. PC 01-03-074F. Source: Canadian Museum for Human Rights.



Figure 8: Graph showing the Numbers of German Jewish refugees who arrived in selected countries from 1933 until 1945.

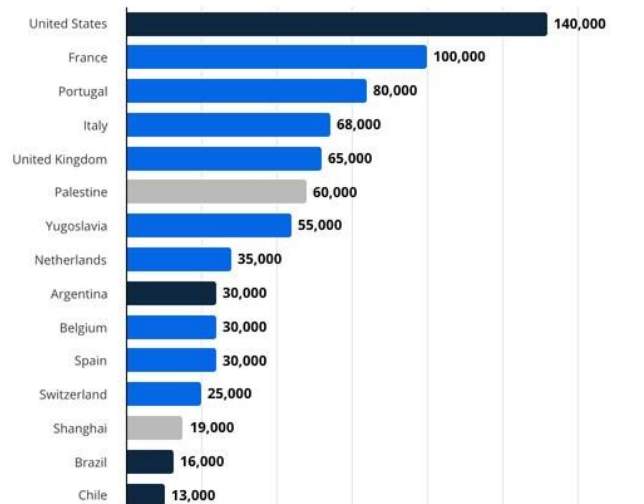


Figure 9: Excerpt from Peter Wilton, “Days of Shame, Montreal, 1934,” Canadian Medical Association Journal, December 9, 2003.

This article examines a strike that paralyzed Montreal’s Notre-Dame Hospital in 1934, following the hiring of Sam Rabinovitch, a Jewish medical intern.

The strike, which lasted from June 15 to 18, 1934, was triggered by the appointment of Dr. Sam Rabinovitch as senior intern at Montreal’s Notre-Dame Hospital. It had nothing to do with his qualifications. In fact, he had graduated at the top of his class at the Université de Montréal and he was from a medical family — 4 of his older brothers were already doctors.

So what was the problem?

Sam Rabinovitch was Jewish, Notre-Dame was Catholic, and his appointment, which was to take effect June 15, 1934, would make him the first Jew to hold a staff position at a French-Canadian hospital.

As the date approached, instigators among the interns at Notre-Dame started to protest the fact that a “Hebrew” was joining the staff, and they circulated a petition demanding that the appointment be revoked. To its credit, the hospital administration did not budge, and at midnight June 14, all Notre-Dame interns walked off the job. They refused to provide care to anyone, including emergency patients.

By June 17, the strike had expanded to include interns at 4 other Montreal hospitals, and nurses were threatening to join the protest. There was even a possibility that it would move beyond the hospital and develop into a general boycott of Jewish businesses and the Jewish community in general.

On June 18, at 4 pm, Rabinovitch formally resigned from his position at Notre-Dame. His letter of resignation was published in many of Montreal’s newspapers: “In view of the serious and dangerous conditions to which the patients of the Notre-Dame and other hospitals have been exposed because of the refusal of a number of the interns to take orders from their superiors, and [because of] the embarrassment of the various boards of Notre-Dame and other hospitals, I feel it my duty as a physician to tender my resignation as intern to your hospital.

“... I bemoan the fact that so many French-Canadian physicians, namely [new] graduates, should have ignored the first duty of their oath which they have so recently taken, and am glad of the fact that my resignation will make possible the immediate care that is so badly needed by those poor unfortunates who are today patients in the hospitals affected by the controversy.”

Within hours, the interns were back at work. The hospital had threatened to fire them, but they were allowed to continue at their posts.

As for Rabinovitch, he left Montreal for an internship in St. Louis. It was arranged by the administrators at Notre-Dame and, ironically, took him to another Catholic hospital, where he specialized in internal medicine.

Seventy years following those dark days, Rabinovitch still makes his way to his medical clinic each day. Today, at age 94 and through one of life's rich ironies, he is thought to be Canada's oldest practising physician.

When he returned to Montreal to practise in 1940, his patients included both Catholics and Jews. "The patients cared more about my reputation for being a caring and honest doctor than they did about my religion," Rabinovitch explains.

As for that long-ago strike, he sums up his feelings this way: "I bear no ill will toward anybody. The hospital administration was wonderful to me — it was just a few instigators that stirred up all the trouble, and for them it was just the case that I was Jewish and they were Catholics.

"I just did not belong. I suppose in the end that is the frightening thing about hatred ... it is just that simple."

- **Guiding questions:**

- How does the language and imagery used in the cartoon reflect antisemitic attitudes in Quebec in the 1930s?
- What does the defacement of the synagogue suggest about the nature and extent of antisemitism in Quebec during the 1930s?
- What patterns do you observe in the number of German Jewish refugees admitted to different countries between 1933 and 1945? What does the graph suggest about Canada's response to Jewish refugees in comparison with other countries?
- To what extent does Rabinovitch's experience support the argument that antisemitism was embedded within Canadian society in the 1930s?

5. Closing:

Return to Les's father's experience and consider what the burned tallit represents in the context of the escalating persecution of Jews. Use this personal story to reflect on the broader significance of Kristallnacht and its place within the trajectory of Nazi persecution.

- **Guiding questions:**

- Now that Kristallnacht has been placed in the trajectory of escalating violence, what does it mean for Les's father to wear his burned tallit with pride?
- Why was Kristallnacht a turning point in the persecution of Jews, both within Germany and internationally?