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## From Exclusion to Embrace: How World War II and the Holocaust Shaped Canada's Immigration Policies

A country that, during one of the most pivotal moments in history, turned away thousands of people, to later turn into one of the world's most immigrant-friendly nations. World War II not only reshaped global politics, but also significantly influenced Canada's approach to immigration ultimately shaping it to become a more inclusive system. This shift in Canada's immigration policies was deeply influenced by the haunting impact of the Holocaust. Canada is one of the most immigrant accepting countries in the world today, accepting around 400 000 new immigrants each year. Data shows it is a global leader in refugee resettlement as the country has built a strong reputation over the last 50 years as one that values newcomers (Murphy 2024). It is largely welcoming and open to different cultures and communities. This leads us to wonder, how has Canada's immigration policies changed overtime. The profound impact of the Holocaust on a global scale led Canada to reevaluate its immigration policies, resulting in gradual reforms that opened the door to greater acceptance of refugees in the years that followed.

Canada's immigration system during and after World War II underwent significant changes, it reflected upon the shifting global geopolitical landscape, as the country moved from restrictive policies to a more open approach in the post-war years. The Holocaust was a very significant period that prompted Canada to expand its immigration system. This change did not occur during the war directly, but was later on enforced to create refuge to survivors and foster a more inclusive society. While Canadians did not directly experience the Holocaust, the majority of its population was antisemitic. During this time Canada's immigration system was rather strict, with nearly 187 000 people fleeing from Europe to Canada. It is because of the large rise in Nazism that threatened hundreds of thousands of European Jews

to seek refuge, including in Canada. Many of these refugees were Holocaust survivors, former prisoners of war, and thousands who were unable or unwilling to return to their pre-war homes. Between 1933 and 1948, less than 5000 Jewish refugees were allowed into Canada – the smallest number of any Allied nation.

This small number is a result of the large amount of antisemitism during World War II, antisemitism in Canada was clear in its refusal to increase Jewish refugee admissions at the Evian Conference. Antisemitism was common among William Lyon Mackenzie King's Liberal Government of Canada. Decisions about Canada's immigration policies regarding the growing refugee crisis were led by Frederick Blair. Frederick Blair, director of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources, was blatantly anti-Semitic. The Evian Conference was brought together by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This Conference was a gathering of world leaders to address the growing crisis of German and Austrian Jewish refugees from Nazism. Mackenzie King did not want Canada to attend. He feared that Canadian participation might be seen as a willingness to accept Jewish refugees. He believed that letting more Jews enter Canada might "create a new problem here" and could lead to an "intermixture of foreign strains of blood" that would tarnish Canadian society. After giving in to US and British Pressure, he reluctantly agreed to send Canadian delegates to the Evian Conference. In the end, the Dominican Republic was the only Evian country to offer Jews asylum (Goldberg 2016).

After World War II, Canada changed its immigration system to address economic needs and promote diversity. The 1952 Immigration Act allowed more skilled workers and refugees, while the 1967 points system ended race-based policies, focusing on skills and experience. These changes, along with the 1971 adoption of multiculturalism, helped shape Canada into a more inclusive, multicultural society. Refugees and others displaced by war and violence have become a significant part of Canada's immigration flow (Troper 2013). In the postwar labour shortage, Canada admitted tens of thousands of displaced people.

The lessons from the Holocaust helped Canada realize the importance of welcoming people in need, regardless of their background. These profound lessons learned from the Holocaust played a significant role in reshaping Canada's approach to immigration, creating a more inclusive and compassionate system. Today, Canada stands as a global leader in refugee resettlement and cultural

integration, demonstrating the large impact of historical events on the development of welcoming immigration policies (Jensen 2022).

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