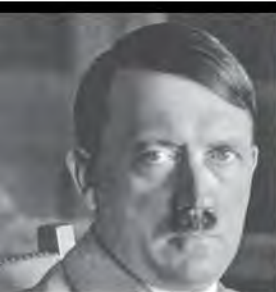




RIGHTING CANADA'S WRONGS

Anti-Semitism and the *MS St. Louis*

Canada's Anti-Semitic Immigration
Policies in the Twentieth Century



Rona Arato

JAMES LORIMER & COMPANY LTD., PUBLISHERS
TORONTO

Copyright © 2021 by Rona Arato and James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers acknowledges funding support from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), an agency of the Government of Ontario. We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country. This project has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada and with the support of Ontario Creates.

Canada  Canada Council  Conseil des arts
for the Arts du Canada

 ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

 ONTARIO
CREATES

Cover design: Gwen North

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Anti-Semitism and the MS *St. Louis* :
Canada's anti-Semitic immigration policies in the
twentieth century / Rona Arato.

Names: Arato, Rona, author.

Series: Righting Canada's wrongs.

Description: Series statement: Righting Canada's
wrongs | Includes bibliographical references and
index.

Identifiers: Canadiana 20200213709 | ISBN
9781459415669 (hardcover)

Subjects: LCSH: *St. Louis* (Ship)—Juvenile
literature. | LCSH: Anti-semitism—Canada—
History—20th century—Juvenile literature. |
LCSH: Canada—Emigration and immigration—
Government policy—History—20th
century—Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Jewish
refugees—History—20th century—Juvenile
literature. | LCSH: Jewish refugees—Government
policy—Canada—History—20th century
Juvenile literature. | LCSH: Holocaust, Jewish
(1939–1945)—Juvenile literature. | LCSH:
Jews—Canada—History—20th century—Juvenile
literature. | LCSH: Jews—Germany—History—
20th century—Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC DS146.C2 A73 2020 | DDC
j305.892/407109044—dc23

James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers
117 Peter St., Suite 304
Toronto, ON, Canada
M5V 0M3
www.lorimer.ca

Printed and bound in South Korea
Manufactured by Prinpia Co., Ltd.
Job #FP2020-01

*For Cy, Samantha, Tali and Simon,
the next generation*

Acknowledgements

Writing this book has been a rewarding experience. I am indebted to the people who helped me make the history come alive. Thank you to Peter and Gilda Spitz, who provided the story and photos of Peter's mother, Ursula, who was a child on the *St. Louis*. I had interviewed Ursula for the "Survivors of the Shoah Visual History" project, so it was especially gratifying to reconnect with her family.

Thank you to Ana Maria Gordon, who is the only *St. Louis* survivor living in Canada. I spent a delightful afternoon with Ana Maria as she shared her memories of the voyage. Her son Donald Gruner sent the photos that we have used in the book.

The "Tailor Project" that brought in hundreds of Jewish Holocaust survivors was, until recently, a relatively unknown story. I want to thank my friend Anne Dublin for her detailed account of how her family came to Canada through that program.

My editor, Pam Hickman, has been an invaluable partner in writing this book. Carrie Gleason, the publisher, has been a great help guiding me on what to include in the narrative.

And lastly, I would like to thank Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Canadian government for recognizing a wrong; apologizing on behalf of the Canadian people and vowing that this form of discrimination will never happen in Canada again.



Contents

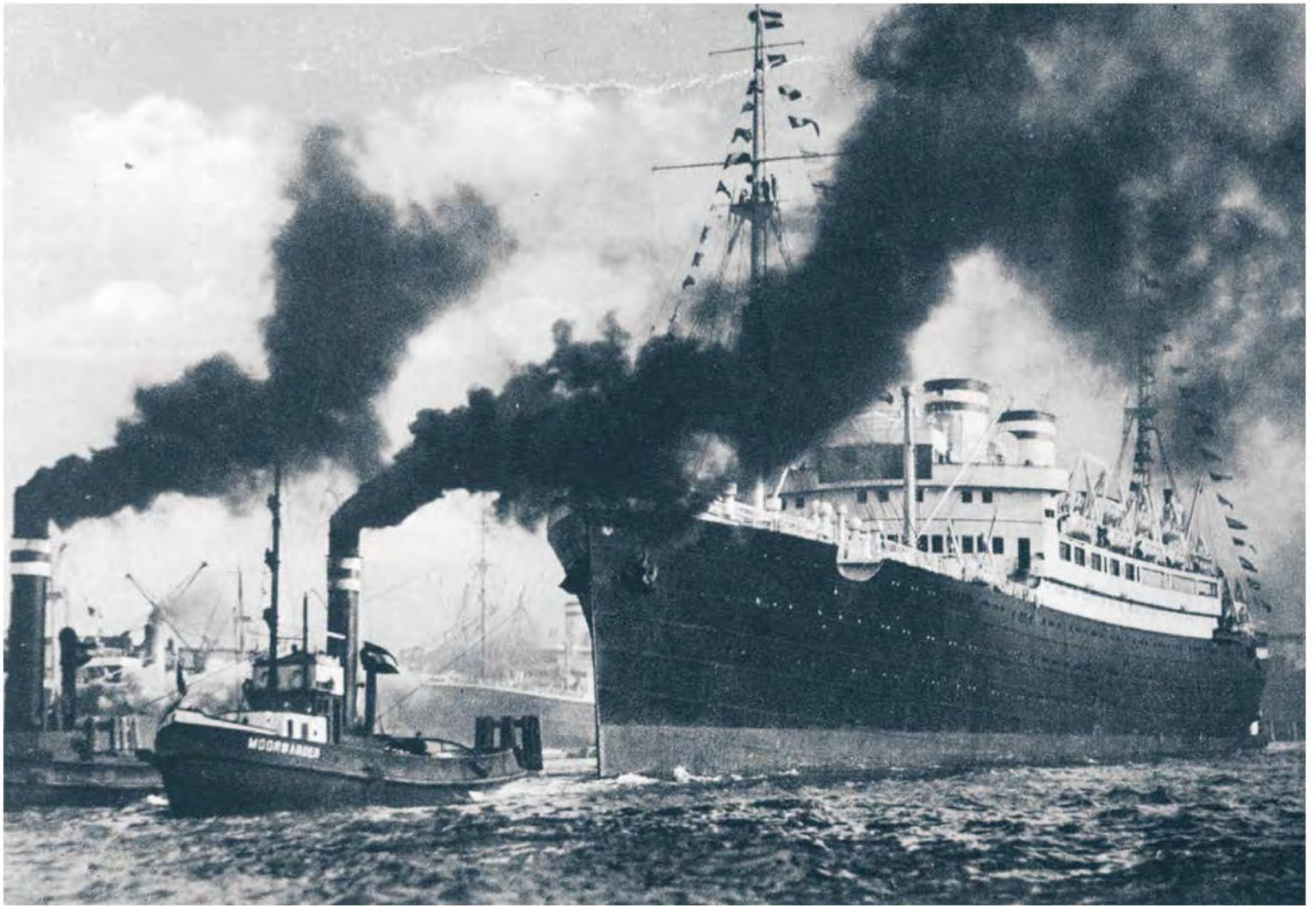
INTRODUCTION	5	OPENING DOORS	
PROLOGUE: The Resilience of Jewish Culture Through History.....	6	War Orphans Project.....	62
COME TO CANADA		Welcome to Canada	64
Leaving Europe	8	The Tailor Project	68
Settling in Canada	12	ACKNOWLEDGING THE PAST	
Early Canadian Society	18	Fighting for an Apology	70
ANTI-SEMITISM IN GERMANY		We Are Sorry	72
The Rise of Hitler	20	Overcoming Anti-Semitism in Canada	76
Need to Escape	24	Remembering the MS <i>St. Louis</i>	80
Saving Children.....	26	Timeline	82
ANTI-SEMITISM IN CANADA		Glossary	84
Racism on the Rise	28	For Further Reading	86
Canada Closes its Doors	32	Visual Credits	86
Fight for Immigration	34	Index	88
MS ST. LOUIS			
Ship of Hope	36		
Life on Board.....	40		
Arrival in Cuba	44		
Searching for Safety	46		
Return to Europe.....	48		
Fate of the Passengers.....	50		
CANADA AT WAR, 1939–45			
Canada Declares War	52		
Enemy Aliens	54		
Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada	56		
Life in the Internment Camp	58		
Refugees Released.....	60		



**WATCH
THE VIDEO**

Look for this symbol throughout the book for links to video and audio clips available online.

Visit www.lorimer.ca/wrongs to see the entire series.



Introduction

Jewish immigration to Canada began in the middle of the eighteenth century. The earliest Jews came as fur trappers, adventurers or members of the British army. Later waves of immigration were mostly from Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire where anti-Semitism (anti-Jewish racism), poverty and violent, government-sponsored persecution propelled Jews to search for a better life. From 1881 to 1914, two million Jews left Eastern Europe, most immigrating to the United States and many to Canada. At the time, Canada was looking for immigrants to populate its vast country. Farmers, labourers and skilled workers were all in high demand.

During the 1920s and 30s, immigrants to Canada were viewed as unwanted competition for already scarce jobs. There was a significant increase in anti-immigration sentiment and, especially, anti-Jewish protests. The rise of Hitler and Nazism in Germany fueled these attitudes. As conditions for Jews in Germany worsened, Canada closed its doors to Jewish immigrants. At a time when Jews were desperate to escape from Nazi Germany, widespread anti-Semitism was a major factor in keeping them out of Canada. In 1939, Canada's head of immigration, Frederick Blair, was asked how many Jews Canada should accept. He replied, "None is too many."

This attitude culminated in "The *St. Louis* Affair." In 1939, Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King refused to allow a ship of over 900 Jewish refugees, who were fleeing Nazi Germany, to enter the country. In this book, you will read about some of the families who were on board and what became of them. You will meet Ana Maria Karman who

was four years old when she sailed on the ship with her family. She is the last Canadian survivor of the voyage and was interviewed for this book. Teens Eric and Ursula Spitz were also on the ship Canada turned away. The ship was forced to return to Europe where many of the passengers died during the war.

During the Second World War, thousands of Canadian Jews served in the armed forces. At the same time, organizations such as the Canadian Jewish Congress fought a losing battle with the Canadian government to accept more Jewish refugees. After the war, a booming economy and labour shortages encouraged the government to open Canada's doors to increased immigration. Jewish refugees, most of whom were Holocaust survivors, came to restart lives destroyed during the war. Among them were over a thousand Jewish boys and girls who came as part of the War Orphans Project. Another project, the Tailor Project, brought in 2,200 skilled tailors, half of whom were Jewish Holocaust survivors.

In the 1950s and 60s, attitudes toward Jews and other minorities began to change. In the 1970s, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau encouraged the concept of multiculturalism and acceptance of people from all over the world. Jewish immigrants who came during this period achieved success in many fields, including business, science, medicine and arts.

Today, Canada strives to celebrate its multicultural society. Part of this policy involves recognizing past wrongs and apologizing on behalf of previous governments. In 2018, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued a formal apology to survivors of the *St. Louis* for Canada's role in the tragedy, as well as to all Jewish Canadians for the discrimination that they and their families have experienced in Canada.

PROLOGUE

THE RESILIENCE OF JEWISH CULTURE THROUGH HISTORY

Jews are an ethnic and religious group of people who originated in the Middle East over 5,000 years ago and follow a religion called Judaism. It is commonly believed that Jews were slaves in Egypt about 3,000 years ago. According to their belief, God freed them and gave Moses the Torah which sets out laws that Jews follow. After the Jews left Egypt, God promised them their own land they called Israel. They made Jerusalem their capital and built the Temple, which was a centre for worship. Around 600 BCE, Babylonia (present-day Iraq) invaded the Kingdom of Judah (present-day Israel), destroyed Jerusalem and burned the Temple. The Jews were deported to Babylonia. The exile lasted for 70 years until the Jews were allowed to return to their land. They rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple. About 2,000 years ago, Rome conquered what was then called Judea. After a series of revolts, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Second Temple, and deported the Jews. Many fled to Babylonia, Northern Africa, Spain and Portugal. Others were taken to Rome as slaves or labourers. This began what is known as the Diaspora (Jews living outside Israel). Jews who went to Spain and Portugal are called Sephardic, after the Hebrew word *Sepharad* for Spain. Jews who went to Western and Eastern Europe are called Ashkenazi, from the Hebrew word for German. Jews now live around the world but throughout history have been the victims of anti-Jewish beliefs and behaviours.

History of anti-Semitism

The term “anti-Semitism” refers to prejudice or discrimination against Jews as individuals and as a group. Jews have been persecuted throughout history. In Ancient Greece and Rome, Jews were persecuted for their determination to practice their religion rather than adopting the social and religious customs of the society. After Christianity spread throughout Europe, Jews were often forced to live in separate neighbourhoods called ghettos, and to wear a yellow badge or other symbol to identify themselves as Jews. They were not granted citizenship in most European countries until the late 1700s and early 1800s. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Jews in Russia and other European countries faced violent anti-Jewish riots called pogroms. Thousands of Jews were killed. Millions of Jews fled Europe for Canada and other countries.



Synagogues

Jewish houses of worship are called synagogues, pictured on the left. Spiritual leaders are called rabbis, which means “teachers.” Most synagogues also have a cantor, who chants the service. Synagogues serve as the centre of Jewish life. They provide a sanctuary for services and are used for study, social gatherings and community events. Synagogues have been used by Jewish people since the Babylonian exile.



The Torah

The Torah, pictured here, is the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, including the Ten Commandments. Shabbat, which involves refraining from work activities and engaging in rest, is the only ritual observance written in the Ten Commandments. It is observed from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday as a day of rest and spiritual enrichment.



What is kosher food?

Observant Jewish people only eat food identified as kosher. They only eat cloven-hooved animals, such as sheep, cattle and goats, that chew their cud. Kosher law permits only fish with fins and scales. Shellfish are not kosher. Meat and dairy cannot be eaten together. Only certain birds, including chicken, ducks and geese, are kosher.

Celebrating children

Life events are celebrated in special ways. In a brit milah, a Jewish boy is circumcised and named eight days after his birth. Jewish girls are named in a baby naming ceremony. Bar and bat mitzvah mean “son and daughter of the commandment.” Each is a coming of age ceremony that boys celebrate at thirteen and girls at twelve or thirteen years old. To prepare, they study Jewish history and customs with a rabbi and cantor, and learn to read Hebrew so they can chant a portion of the Torah in front of a congregation.



Menorah

Judaism’s most ancient symbol is the menorah, the official symbol of Israel. The Hanukkah menorah, left, holds nine candles — one for each night of Hanukkah plus an extra candle, called the Shamash, used to light all of the others. The feast of Hanukkah commemorates Jewish victory in 167 BCE over the Greeks. The six-pointed Star of David in the centre is a common symbol of Judaism.

Welcome to a Jewish home

A Mezuzah, pictured here, is a case attached to a doorpost to signify a Jewish home. The case contains a handwritten parchment scroll from the Torah stating: “The words that I shall tell you this day: that you shall love your God, believe only in Him, keep His commandments, and pass all of this on to your children.”



Special holidays

Jews have several special celebrations throughout the year, based on the Jewish calendar. Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is in the fall. Yom Kippur, a day of fasting and reflection, comes ten days later. Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days in December, and Passover, which commemorates the Jewish exodus from Egypt, is always in the spring. During Passover, Jews eat matzo, pictured here, to symbolize the unleavened bread that they took with them when fleeing Egypt.

CHAPTER 1

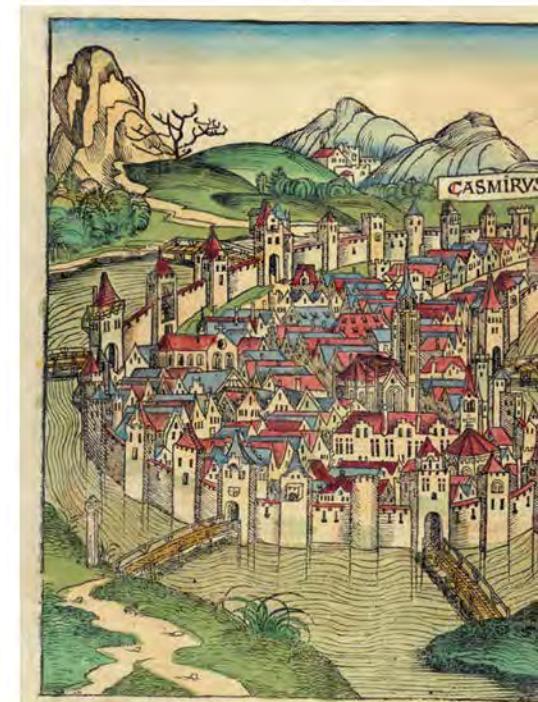
COME TO CANADA

Leaving Europe

Early Jewish immigrants to Canada in the 1700s and early 1800s were mainly European adventurers, explorers and entrepreneurs. In the mid to late 1800s, life in Europe became very difficult and dangerous due to growing anti-Semitism (hostility against Jews), pogroms (organized massacres of an ethnic group) and economic hardship. More Jews decided to leave. This second wave of Jewish immigrants was mostly peasants, farmers and labourers.

Where Jewish immigrants came from

Many Jewish immigrants came to Canada in the late 1800s and early 1900s from countries in eastern Europe.



Poland's Jews

Since 1264, Jews have lived in Krakow, Poland, pictured above, in what was known as Austria-Hungary until 1918. Life became very difficult in the late 1800s due to rising anti-Semitism and violence against Jews. Many decided to leave their country and seek a safer and better life in Canada.