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Humanities 10  
Oct. 11, 2019

## **The Voyage of the St. Louis Vessel**

Many people think Canada is a welcoming country, but this hasn't always been true. Would you believe that Canada was responsible for the death of hundreds of people during World War II. Many countries, including Canada, did not accept refugees from arriving vessels from dangerous countries like Germany. In 1939, The MS St. Louis ship carried over 900 Jewish refugees during World War II from Germany, over the Pacific Ocean to America to save them from the racism in Germany. As they arrived in Canada, the Canadian Minister of immigration, Blair said that the refugees didn't qualify for current immigration laws. They couldn't stay, and had to leave North America to search for another country where they could land. After Canada turned away Jewish refugees on the St. Louis Vessel, the country changed its policies towards refugees. The St. Louis is a significant event in history that changed Canada as a country.

The St. Louis Vessel travelled to many different countries around the world, trying to save the refugees. The ship sailed on May 13th 1939, leaving from Hamburg Germany to sail to Cuba. After the Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glasses) took place the night of November 9th to 10th, the government started a programme against Jewish people living in Germany. Many Jewish homes, stores, and churches got destroyed, many Jews decided to leave Germany. They paid for Cuban residence permits to stay in Cuba, while they waited for their US visas. After the ship had arrived

in Havana, the Cuban government canceled their residence permits so the people weren't allowed to get off the ship. The captain of the ship Gustav Schroeder decided to sail to the States trying to deliver the refugees there without visas. Many Americans sympathized with the passengers after American Newspaper published the story. Nevertheless the US government did not let them stay because they did not have their US immigration visas yet or passed any security control. Even Canada did not accept the refugees for the same reasons. This was when the ship had to go back to Europe.

The St. Louis refugees were denied entry to Canada, and were sent back to Europe. After trying to enter Canada on 7th of June the Minister of Justice Ernest Lopez, was "emphatically opposed" to admitting the refugees due the fact that the refugees did not qualify under the current immigration laws. The government was under the conviction that no country could open its borders wide enough that hundreds of thousands refugees be it Jews or other refugees, could stay. Although Canada knew about the situation in Germany with the Nazis and racism against especially Jewish people. For that reason Canada decided as well to send the ship back to Europe. Between the years 1931 and 1938 Canada admitted an average 16,280 immigrants and fewer than 5000 Jewish people, because there were scared that when they let this ship land there will be lots more. Even countries which were hit hard by the Depression of the 1930's, like Sweden or the States admitted more people than Canada. They searched for different countries in Europe and finally split the refugees up to France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Poland. Nevertheless just over

the half refugees survived the Holocaust. Over 350 of the refugees died in Nazi roundups in occupied countries in Western Europe.

Canada's immigration policy and people were significantly affected by the rejection of the St. Louis Vessel. The Jewish refugees had difficulties finding a country where they could stay. Even Canada had some anti Semitic thoughts at this time. Today everything looks different. Countries learned from their mistakes and people changed their policies. Canadas immigration policy is lot different today. Refugees are allowed to live in Canada while they wait for their claim to be decided. Even this event is significant because the St. Louis Vessel was one example of Canada's history of immigration practises for refugees. After this event in November 2000, Doug Blair, baptist Minister at that time finally apologized to 25 surviving St. Louis passengers. Since 2011 there is a sculpture at Pier 21 in Halifax, in the Canadian Museum of Immigration where the vessel originally attempted to land.

The St. Louis voyage is very significant to Canada's history because it was one of a few moments where Canada made mistakes with refugees. There were lots of other ways of how to continue with refugees and not just sending them back with knowing about racism in Germany and deadly consequences this would have. Lots of lives could be saved if the American government had listened to the people, which felt sorry for the refugees and wanted to give them a chance for a new good life. There

were no reasons for the governments don't accept the refugees. Many countries learnt out of events like this and adjust their laws for immigrants and made better rules.

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