

This report was prepared by a Grade 10 Academic student in January 2008. It is an **EXAMPLAR** of the Level 4 for the Final Culminating Project for the Grade 10 Academic History course.

A Proud Canadian

Lesley Lefebvre
2008

The history of our nation is filled with many events that today define us as Canadians. Some of these may be positive making you feel an immense sense of pride, while others may be negative making you feel quite ashamed, but each has influenced our identity. Positive events such as the development of insulin for diabetes, VE day, NORAD, the abolishment of capitol punishment and Medicare make us proud to be Canadians. Sadly, negative events such as the Chinese Head Tax, the Halifax Explosion, Komagata Maru, Japanese internment camps, the October Crisis and the Great Depression equally affected us as Canadians by creating a feeling of shame. Two specific events that affected us as Canadians were the 1982 establishment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the WWII voyage of the *S.S. St. Louis*. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms allows Canadians to act and speak freely which preserves our identity. This is very antagonistic to the *St. Louis* because many potential Canadians were denied basic rights and freedoms. They were also refused passage into Canada which resulted in their deaths. These two events impacted how I feel as a Canadian by creating pride and shame.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms makes me proud to be Canadian because it shows a high moral standard. It outlines basic rights granted every Canadian. In 1960, the commitment to human rights protection was underway with the Canadian Bill of Rights. However, the Canadian Bill of Rights did not succeed because other laws could be made in exception to it (Department of Justice Canada, 2005). In 1982, the Charter was enacted and implemented into Canada's Constitution (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2006). Its recognition by Canadians like me is very rewarding. Now, everyone is considered equal, and rules were established against discrimination and double standards. It makes me feel proud that everybody is considered equal within our society when many people in other world countries are

treated oppositely.

One reason that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms makes me feel proud to be a Canadian is because it gives everyone equal rights. It does so by setting forth the principle that religion, ethnicity, disability, sex, or any other demographic should not affect somebody's level of importance or their opportunities or rights. When everyone in a society can respect each other and put aside their differences, it creates a sense of togetherness. If the Government was able to make laws targeting different groups of people, there would be a separation between the people in our society. I am proud of the togetherness and regard for each other that we execute.

Another reason that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms creates a sense of pride towards my country is that it provides an example and a model to other countries with respect to fairness, equality and tolerance. It makes Canada a leader. I am very proud of being a country that others would wish to emulate. For example in Afghanistan, there are many incidents of women exposed to gender-based persecution. The United Nations has reported on many incidents regarding women with respect to systematic rape, limited educational opportunities and unequal treatment under the law (Bora Laskin Law Library, 2004). As a United Nations member, Canada is part of this monitoring effort. In Canada, Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives both sexes equal rights (Department of Justice Canada, 2005). Our nation differs from other countries that do not have equal rights implemented into their society. We can be a leader for these other countries which could make the world a better, more peaceful place. I am proud of this leadership that Canada portrays.

The last reason that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms makes me proud to be Canadian is because it promotes diversity. We have freedoms to do what we like as long as we follow civil laws. In Section 2 of the Charter, we are granted fundamental freedoms including freedoms of religion, belief, thought, opinion, expression and peaceful assembly (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2006). These freedoms give people the right to be who they are without fear of persecution. If people

have the freedom to be different, they will feel more comfortable in doing so knowing that their differences are accepted. This makes our nation more multicultural. For example, it would not be fair if people were not allowed to be a religion just because the majority of people don't believe in it. It makes me feel proud to live in a nation where people can be who they want and still be accepted for it. I feel an extensive sense of pride when I think about how our country believes in human equality.

The voyage of the *St. Louis* makes me feel ashamed to be Canadian. We have a high moral standard which this event in history does not portray. About 900 Jewish refugees were aboard *The S.S. St. Louis*. After attempting to enter Cuba and the United States, they also were refused entrance into Canada and forced to return to Germany (Wikipedia, 2007). Most died in the Holocaust (CBC, 2006). This event does not describe Canadians, make us better people or entail us respecting others. One reason why I am ashamed of this event in history is because it does not represent the things we presently believe as Canadians. At this time, we pride ourselves as a multicultural country. This is not portrayed when we turned down refugees. We believe in human rights -- hence, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter promotes human equality despite demographic association. By turning down refugees, Canadians were exhibiting the exact opposite behaviour expression in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There was no reason why the Jewish public should not have been allowed into Canada when we were perfectly capable of offering refuge.

Another reason that explains why the voyage of the *S.S. ST. Louis* is a shameful event is because we turned down people in need of help. The Jews were in grave danger and they had done nothing wrong. We did not even accept those 900 Jews whose lives were in jeopardy. Canada knew there was persecution in Germany; yet, we sent them back to a country where they faced almost certain death (CBC, 2006). We could have saved lives but, we chose to ignore their plight. If somebody is in need of help and you are capable to providing aid, you should help them. According to CBC (2006), the Canadian government did everything in its capability to stop the European Jews from entering our country. It would have been more benevolent, like our nation is now; to let

the Jews in instead of focusing the energy to make them leave.

The last reason for my remorse toward this historical event is that it makes look like an egocentric country. We were more worried about what was happening inside our own country then our position as a global leader and assistant. We had a selfish feeling when we should have been helping others. Smaller countries were able to liberate 15,000 to 20,000 Jews while Canada had only accepted 4,000 to 5,000 throughout the war (CBC, 2006). Instead of being helpful towards the people who were in pivotal peril, we were looking at how many refugees we wanted in our country to maintain the status quo and ensure societal change was minimal. It was a very selfish way of looking at things especially when there were lives at stake. I am very ashamed of our self-indulgence. It makes me feel ashamed to be a Canadian when I think that the Jewish refugees had to go back to Europe to face the Holocaust when we could have accepted them.

My pride as a Canadian is based upon the events that happen as we progress as a nation. Some are very proud moments while others make me feel rather shameful. Two specific events that affected my pride and shame as a Canadian were the establishment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the voyage of the *S.S. St. Louis*. I am proud of the establishment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms because it gives everyone equal rights, it provides an example to other countries and promotes diversity. In opposition, I feel a sense of shame when I think about the people who suffered on the *S.S. St. Louis* because it does not represent the things that we believe in today as Canadians. We turned down people in need of help, and it made us look like an egocentric country. It should be unambiguous as to how these two events impacted how I feel as a Canadian through pride and shame.

Citations

Bora Laskin Law Library. 2004. Women's Human Rights Resources: Women in Afghanistan. (Online). Available: <http://www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/diana/afghanwomen.htm>

- CBC. 2006. None is too many. (Online). Available:
<http://archives.cbc.ca/400i.asp?IDCat=71&IDDos=1579&IDCli=10644&IDLan=1&NoCli=5&type=clip>
- Department of Justice Canada. 2005. (Online). Available. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/fs/2003/doc_30898.html
- Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada. 2006. "History of the Charter." (Online). Available: http://www.charterofrights.ca/en/26_00_01
- Rosenberg, Jennifer. 2007. Voyage of the St. Louis. About.com; 20th Century History. (Online). Available:
<http://history1900s.about.com/od/holocaust/a/stlouis.htm?p=1>
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. 2007. Voyage of the St. Louis. (Online). Available: <http://ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?ModuleId=10005267>
- Wikipedia. 2007. SS St. Louis. (Online). Available:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_St._Louis