Reflective Statement

This spring semester, I was enrolled in HIS466: Topics in History: Race in Canada, taught by Professor Lisa R. Mar. The final evaluative component of the course was a research paper on the broad topic of race in Canada, on which we were meant to choose a more focused topic. I chose to research social anti-Semitism in Canada in the 1930s.

My research began with a thorough search of the secondary literature on this topic. For this, I went to the University of Toronto Libraries website, searching for both books and essays on the topic. Throughout this endeavor, I used both basic and advanced search techniques—using both the basic library search tool, as well as the more advanced version thereof, inputting particular terms like “Jews,” “discriminate,” “reject,” “racism,” “Judaism,” etc.; following footnotes found in the books and articles found; and, *inter alia*, speaking with experts in the field (*viz.* past professors in the field and other known sources) and librarians to locate the most prominent authors on the topic. I was surprised that, while extensive scholarship was focused on the discrimination to which Jews were subject in the context of immigration during this period, there was a dearth of scholarly attention paid towards the social and personal experiences of anti-Jewish discrimination therein. I, thus, felt that I could contribute to this topic by concentrating on these more personal elements of anti-Semitism.

My research began in earnest with a trip to the Ontario Jewish Archives (“OJA”). A peer of mine, with whom I had discussed my research, recommended a specific expert at the Archives, and he and I arranged to meet. I explained to him my research topic, and given its breadth and unfocused nature at this point, he pulled several large boxes of material for me. These included clippings detailing the anti-Semitism Jews in Ontario experienced—*e.g.*, that in residential areas (*viz.* those infamous “Gentiles Only” signs prevalent in the thirties), social scenes (*e.g.* at hotels,
resorts, restaurants, dance halls, swimming facilities, sporting clubs, social clubs, and bathhouses, etc.), and education—as well as those experiences of violence at Christie Pits and elsewhere. While my research was initially on all of Canada, the richness of the sources found at the Archives led me to focus my topic further. I, thus, chose to focus specifically on the Greater Toronto Area.

Throughout our course, I was constantly surprised by the discrepancy between Canadians’ professed commitment to the “fair play” ideology of their Mother Country and their manifestation of various forms of racism throughout the early twentieth century. Going through the archives, this feeling was particularly acute. Thus, I thought it would be apt to research whether Canadians’ identification with “fair play” at all influenced their behaviour, especially that in relation to minorities, using social anti-Semitism in the thirties in Toronto as a case study.

My research for my finalized topic included the resources at the OJA, the U of T Libraries, and The Globe newspaper archives (via the U of T Libraries). Thus, I used newspaper clippings from the Globe; autobiographies and auto-narratives found in books and essays from the library and OJA; letters written by prominent Jewish leaders and citizens, alike, referencing Toronto’s anti-Semitism problem; secondary sources describing said anti-Semitism; photos of “Gentiles Only” signs and the like; meeting minutes from the Canadian Jewish Congress from the thirties; advertisements created by non-Jews from the time; and, inter alia, video and audio sources of Jewish victims describing their experiences of anti-Semitism. To determine the quality of these sources, I had a unique criteria for each type of source. For secondary sources, for example, I evaluated their primary sources by referencing their footnotes and bibliographies; for primary sources, I discussed their veracity or potential authoritativeness with the relevant OJA or scholarly expert. As best possible, I tried to references multiple perspectives, including reading books from both Jews and non-Jews, locating primary sources from various authors (e.g. both the head of the
Canadian Jewish Congress and normal citizens, as well as non-Jews describing the situation), and referencing materials from both the thirties and today, so as to benefit from hindsight. Locating such a variety was, however, slightly difficult given the narrow focus of my paper on Toronto in the 1930s.

Ultimately, my research concluded that Canada’s imperial identity had little affective potency to compel equality or inclusion for its country’s Jews in the 1930s. This begs the question of the affective power of the imperial identity in Canada, more specifically, and national identity as a concept, more generally. While I believe that this was demonstrated, there remained some gaps in my research. For example, one gap was the lack of explicit debate between Jews and non-Jews about this discrepancy between ideology and practice; I think my research would have benefited, for example, of a conversation between a non-Jew and Jew about Canadians’ failure to have practiced what they idiomatically preached. Moreover, a dead-end in my research included the fact that imperial identity norms, which suggested treating all with fairness and tolerance, applied only to whites at this time. Despite these problems, however, I believe that my research was both thorough and effective in its goal in demonstrating the affective limits of national identity in Canada in the thirties vis-à-vis Toronto’s Jews.