

NOTE TO READERS

It is important for students and teachers to understand that some of the themes/material in this discussion guide include historical beliefs and representations that are now recognized as antisemitic, discriminatory, harmful, and/or inappropriate. Though these beliefs would not be appropriate in today's context, they provide important insights into the lived experiences, societal norms, and policies of the time. Changing this language would alter the original information and remove its historical context.

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Discussion Guide: "Fascism in Canada"

Source: Nora Loreto, "Fascism in Canada," *Canada's History*, Summer 2026.

Grade level: High school

Time required: Two classes (90 minutes)

Essential question: What connections can we make between fascism in the 20th and 21st centuries?

Curriculum connections:

This activity explores the history of fascism in Canada, reflecting on historical and contemporary examples. It connects with broader themes of oppression, antisemitism, Nazism, and propaganda.

BRITISH COLUMBIA | Political Studies 12 | Social Justice 12 | Law Studies 12 | Social Studies 10 – Canada and the World: 1914 to the Present

ONTARIO | CHC2D/2P Grade 10 Canadian History since World War I | CHV2O Grade 10 Civics and Citizenship | CLU3M Grade 11 Understanding Canadian Law

QUEBEC | History of Quebec and Canada Secondary III and IV | History and Citizenship Education Secondary

NOVA SCOTIA | Citizenship 9 | Law 12 | Canadian History 11 | Global Politics 12

Historical thinking concepts: Historical significance, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives

Discussion questions:

- Why might Jews and minority groups be used as scapegoats for fascism?
- What is the connection between economic hardship and fascism?
- What strategies or tactics did fascist organizations use to gain support from marginalized groups?
- How did the Canadian government and police address fascism in the 20th century?
- What are the connections between fascism in the past and present in Canada?

Introduction:

Start the lesson by defining key terms:

Ask students if they are familiar with the terms "antisemitism" and "fascism." With a table partner, ask them to discuss what they might already know before inviting them to share their answers with the class.

Define the terms antisemitism and fascism for the class and explain some of fascism's main characteristics (i.e., militarism, nationalism, discrimination against minorities, cult of personality). Consider writing definitions on the board or projecting them.

Antisemitism: According to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

Fascism: Fascism is an extreme far-right political ideology that emerged in Europe between the First and Second World Wars. It is characterized by extreme nationalism, militarism and suppression of opposition, discrimination against minorities, and a strong centralized government with a dictatorial leader.

Nationalism: Nationalism is an ideology that emphasizes the importance of one's own nation, encouraging loyalty and service to national goals above all else. This is often seen through the glorification of a country's history, military, or culture. Fascism is often considered an extreme form of nationalism. Note that the term "nation" may refer to a country, but can also mean a group of people defined by race or cultural heritage.

Militarism: Militarism is the belief that a country should have a powerful military. In a militaristic country, the government works to build or maintain a strong military and may use the military to carry out aggressive offensive actions against other states. Fascism is connected to militarism because fascist leaders use military forces to suppress opposition and/or expand territory through conflict.

Cult of personality: Fascism is based on the idea of a government that controls both public and private life (an ideology known as totalitarianism). The leader of these governments becomes a symbol to unite the people and create a sense of loyalty.

Discrimination against minorities: One way fascism gathers support from a population is to define an enemy or scapegoat that is blamed for causing problems. In 1930s Germany, creating fear or anger towards Jews and other minority groups (including Roma and Sinti, gay men, Black people, Jehovah's Witnesses and people

with disabilities) helped unite the dominant group and was an excuse for a fascist Nazi government to exercise more control. As Jews and other minority groups were discriminated against, Nazis, the dominant group, were idealized. They were encouraged to think of themselves as superior, creating a social divide sometimes referred to as an “us vs. them” narrative.

Propaganda Case Study:

Political theory is a complex topic. To better understand fascism, historians often study the rise of Nazi Germany as an example of how fascist ideology can develop.

After the First World War, Germany faced political instability and economic crisis. The Nazi Party rose to power by promising national strength, expanding the military, blaming minority groups for the country’s problems, and uniting the country behind Adolf Hitler. These policies were communicated through propaganda, which influenced public opinion and convinced some people to follow the party’s agenda, even as hate and violence escalated into war.

Select a few images of Nazi propaganda and ask students to apply their knowledge by identifying which characteristics of fascism are represented in the samples displayed. This can be done as a class or in small groups. [See **Appendix A** for primary sources and guiding notes.]

Activity:

Introduce the article “Fascism in Canada” by asking students what they know about fascism in Canada. Start by reading the “How Fascism Works” subheading at the end of the “Fascism in Canada” article. After reading, using the following guiding questions for a class discussion:

- What is fascism? What is its goal?
- What did you learn about fascism? What are the gaps in your understanding?
- What would you like to learn?

As a class, identify one common gap in students’ understanding based on what you have read. Consider how you might address it, including additional research or consulting sources like your school or community library.

Next, read “Fascism in Canada” as a class. Since the article has multiple parts, consider splitting the class into small groups (3-4 students) to read it. You might also consider choosing specific sections of the article to read, based on what is most relevant to your class. As students read, encourage them to make note of unfamiliar

words, phrases or historical references. You might choose to explore these as a class or provide time for students to do additional research independently. [See **Appendix B** for an annotated reading guide which offers context for some of the historical references in the article.]

After reading, write the following quote from the article on the board:

“And while the divide between the rich and the poor in Canada has never been larger – including during the Great Depression – Canadians should look to our past to better understand what made fascism so popular. The formula was simple: a promise of better economic days with the blame for financial troubles laid on a scapegoat.”

Use the following guiding questions to unpack the quote. Students might need to do supplemental research to address gaps in their understanding:

- What is “the divide between the rich and poor in Canada”? What does this mean?
- What is the significance of the Great Depression? What happened during this time in Canada?
- What is a scapegoat? How might financial hardships create conditions for marginalized people to be used as scapegoats for financial woes?

Next, explore the following discussion questions as a class:

- Why might Jews and minority groups be used as scapegoats for fascism?
- What is the connection between economic hardship and fascism?
- What strategies or tactics did fascist organizations use to gain support from marginalized groups?
- How did the Canadian government and police address fascism in the 20th century?
- What are the connections between fascism in the past and present in Canada?

Based on the “formula” for fascism as well as your class discussion, create a checklist that can be used to evaluate the conditions that are conducive to fascism. You might encourage students to do additional research to support the creation of the checklist.

Your class checklist might include the following criteria:

- Economic challenges or disparities
- Promises of better financial conditions by a leader
- Using marginalized groups as scapegoats

Reflection:

Consider the “formula” you created as a class for the conditions of fascism. What connections can you make between the conditions for fascism in the 20th and 21st centuries in Canada?

Extension/Additional Reading:

Using the checklist you created as a class, explore countries around the world and identify conditions that might be conducive to fascism. Consider examining aspects of their political, social, economic, and environmental conditions to make connections.

APPENDIX A: Fascist Propaganda Case Study



#1

"Hitler is building. Help him. Buy German goods," *German Propaganda Archive*, circa 1935.

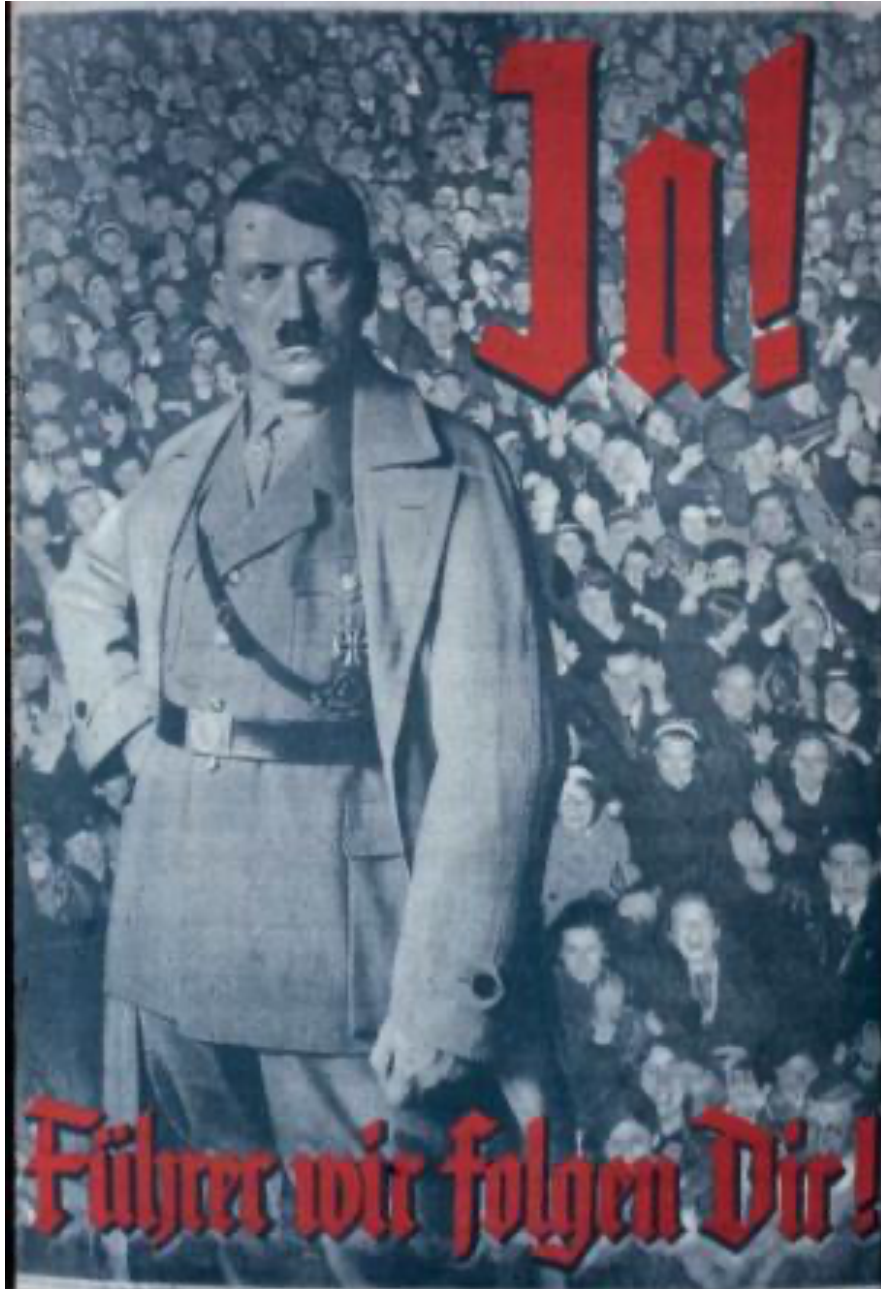
The text reads: "Hitler is building. Help him. Buy German goods."



#2

"S.A. Mann Brand," *German Propaganda Archive*, 1933.

Movie poster for S.A.-Mann Brand. The SA, or Sturmabteilung, was a paramilitary organisation founded by Hitler's Nazi party.



#3

"Führer, we will follow you," *German Propaganda Archive, 1934.*

This political poster features Adolf Hitler with the caption: "Führer, we will follow you."



#4

"Der Giftpilz," German Propaganda Archive, 1938.

This illustration is from a children's story about a young man going to hear a speech from Julius Streicher, a member of the Nazi Party. The text reads: "He who fights the Jews battles the Devil."

Points to note:

Primary source #1

- This poster advertises German goods and building efforts.
- It asks the viewer to “help” by contributing to a national effort.
- The mention of Hitler and the Nazi flag connect national growth to the Nazi party.
- The young white man represents an ideal German citizen.
- This poster represents characteristics of **nationalism**.

Primary source #2

- This poster advertises a movie about a man who joins the Nazi SA paramilitary, portraying the military in a positive light.
- The imagery shows a young man in a proud pose and military uniform.
- The swastika flag and arm band align the soldier with the Nazi party.
- This poster represents characteristics of **militarism**.

Primary source #3

- Hitler is presented as a leader of many people, both through the image and the caption.
- Hitler wears military uniform, representing his personal strength and connecting him to the military.
- The caption, “we will follow you” encourages viewers to obey and support Hitler’s policies.
- This poster represents characteristics of **a cult of personality**.

Primary source #4

- The text compares Jewish people to the devil, making them seem evil and inhuman.
- The fact that this is a children’s book shows how widespread antisemitism was.
- The character in the middle wears a military uniform.
- Poster of a Nazi politician and Nazi flags in the background show a connection between official policies and discrimination against Jewish people.
- This poster represents characteristics of **discrimination against minorities**.

After discussing each of the primary sources and the characteristics of fascism, ask students to work with a partner or small group to reflect on one of the following questions. Afterwards, ask students to share some of their thoughts.

- What is the purpose of these primary sources? What were the publishers trying to achieve?
- How can media, slogans, or political messaging influence public attitudes in Canada today?
- How might news and ideas from Europe, including Nazi ideology, have influenced attitudes towards Jews in Canada?

APPENDIX B: "FASCISM IN CANADA" READING GUIDE

Source: Nora Loreto, "Fascism in Canada," *Canada's History*, Summer 2026.

Note the reader: This guide can be used by teachers to support students as they read the article "Fascism in Canada." The intention of the guide is to provide more context for historical references featured in the article that students might be unfamiliar with or require a deeper understanding about. The notes are non-exhaustive and are simply a starting point. Teachers might be interested in doing further inquiry with their class into the topics explored.

Excerpt	Annotation
Today, many Canadians express worry about rising fascism. When they share these fears, they're usually connected to fascism's most brutal elements: violence, crackdowns on dissenters, hateful policies toward Jewish people and other ethnicities that a regime deems to be deserving of scorn, for example.	Antisemitism is hatred or prejudice against Jewish people. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance defines antisemitism as, "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."
HOW FASCISM WORKS Fascism is a political system that's imposed through tools such as social control, breaking up labour unions and blaming economic problems on scapegoats (often, Jewish people).	A key component of fascism is blaming a minority group for economic issues. In 1930s Germany, the Nazi Party unjustly placed blame on Jewish people for the country's economic issues after the First World War, including economic devastation and hyperinflation. By using Jewish people as a scapegoat, they expanded Nazism and bolstered their supporters.

In 1937, communists and anti-fascists volunteered with the International Brigades to fight fascists in the Spanish Civil War. A large majority of the 1,547 people from Canada who served were of Eastern European descent.

The Great Depression created a period of economic inequality and social issues. Communist parties leveraged this moment to advocate for policies that favoured the working class and poor. This led to an increase in communist ideology across Eastern Europe during the 1930s.

The clubs didn't need to try very hard to mobilize people to terrorize Jews. In his book about the Jewish experience in Canada, *Seeking the Fabled City*, Allan Levine writes, "During the period from the early 1880s to the early 1960s, anti-Semitism was ingrained in the fabric of Canadian society, imposed and practised openly, usually without hesitation, qualifications or shame.... It was not acceptable to have Jewish work colleagues, Jewish neighbours or, worst of all, Jewish members at private sports and social clubs. That was just the way it was."

In the 1930s, Jewish people were discriminated against in Canada. Some universities would not allow them to attend, and many industries did not hire them. Some clubs, beaches and resorts also had "No Jews or Dogs Allowed" signs, barring them from entering. Then Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's policies actively restricted Jewish immigration. For example, Jewish refugees aboard the *MS St. Louis* sailed from Europe, attempting to flee Nazi rule and persecution. Canada was one of the countries in North America they petitioned to grant them entry. They were forced to sail back to Europe. Many later died in the Holocaust.



This image depicts the Heil Hitler salute, an infamous hand gesture associated with the Nazi Party and their leader, Hitler. Due to the atrocities committed against the Jews by the Nazis, it is a symbol of antisemitism. It represented dominance and praise for Hitler. In present day Germany, the salute is illegal and largely forbidden in other parts of the world.

Additionally, as Thomas Prymak writes in <i>Maple Leaf and Trident: The Ukrainian Canadians During the Second World War</i>, there was some support for fascism among Ukrainians who supported Hitler after he promised to create a Ukrainian homeland.	Germany intended to take over Ukraine as part of their plan to rule all Eastern Europe. To do this, Hitler made promises to Ukrainian nationalists to support their fight to regain independence. However, Hitler's intention was to weaken the Soviet Union and gain more support for Nazism.
Montreal Mayor Camillien Houde openly supported Mussolini and the Vichy government in France. While he was mayor, he was arrested and interned during the Second World War for opposing conscription. Upon his release, some 50,000 Montrealers greeted him and he soon won back his role as mayor, which he held until 1954.	Camillien Houde, Montreal Mayor during part of the Second World War, was a well-known opponent of conscription and the federal government's efforts to expand Canada's military commitment during the war. In 1942, he encouraged French Canadians in Quebec not to register for the national registration process, a position that was considered illegal by the federal government. He was arrested by the RCMP and interned in Ontario during the war. His views reflected a broader context of French-Canadian nationalism and opposition to Canada's military involvement. Before and during the war, Houde also expressed sympathies toward certain European authoritarian movements, including Mussolini's regime in Italy and the Vichy government in France, reflecting the presence of fascist and authoritarian ideas in some Canadian circles during this period.

In a sweeping history of fascist groups in Canada in the '30s, Michelle McBride argues in her 1997 thesis for her master's degree at Memorial University of Newfoundland that due to the government's lack of anti-Nazi commitment, "opposition to Fascism was led by the Jewish Congress and the Communist Party."

In August 1936, the World Jewish Congress convened for their inaugural meeting in Geneva. The Congress included representatives from Jewish communities across Europe. During this meeting, they voiced concerns about Nazism, fascism and antisemitism spreading throughout Europe. Jewish communities were disproportionately impacted by Nazi and fascist policies and rhetoric, while other governments and organisations remained indifferent or even supportive of fascist movements. The Congress played an integral role in lobbying the League of Nations about these issues. The League of Nations was the world's first intergovernmental body created after the First World War to promote peace and address international disputes. However, the League was ineffective in stopping the Nazi Party and was later disbanded.

This was two years after the Nuremberg Laws had been passed by the Nazis and their re-occupation of Rhineland.

The Nuremberg Laws were enacted by the Nazi Party in September 1935, removing Jews' German citizenship and forbidding Jews and non-Jewish people from getting married or having sex. These discriminatory, anti-Jewish laws created the foundation for future discrimination and atrocities committed against Jews during the Holocaust.