



Righting Canada's Wrongs: Italian Canadian Internment in the Second World War

Pamela Hickman, Jean Smith Cavalluzzo

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Italians came to Canada to seek a better life. From the 1870s to the 1920s they arrived in large numbers and found work mainly in mining, railway building, forestry, construction, and farming. As time passed, many used their skills to set up successful small businesses, often in Little Italy districts in cities like Montreal, Toronto, Hamilton, and Winnipeg. Many struggled with the language and culture in Canada, but their children became part of the Canadian mix.

When Canada declared war on Italy on June 10, 1940, the government used the War Measures Act to label all Italian citizens over the age of eighteen as enemy aliens. Those who had received Canadian citizenship after 1922 were also deemed enemy aliens. Immediately, the RCMP began making arrests. Men, young and old, and a few women were taken from their homes, offices, or social clubs without warning. In all, about 700 were imprisoned in internment camps, mainly in Ontario and New Brunswick.

The impact of this internment was felt immediately by families who lost husbands and fathers, but the effects would live on for decades. Eventually, pressure from the Italian Canadian community led Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to issue an apology for the internment and to admit that it was wrong.

Using historical photographs, paintings, documents, and first-person narratives, this book offers a full account of this little-known episode in Canadian history.

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