

NOTE DE RECHERCHE / RESEARCH NOTE

“A spectacular incident ...
had somehow eluded my attention”:
The Impact of Cyril Levitt and
William Shaffir’s book,
The Riot at Christie Pits (1987)

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The year 2017 marks three decades since the 1987 publication of The Riot at Christie Pits. The book chronicles the events of August 16, 1933, when Toronto experienced one of the most violent riots in Canadian history: young Jewish men retaliated after Nazi sympathizers unfurled a swastika flag at a neighbourhood baseball game. Despite the brutality of the riot, however, it would be 54 years until scholars Cyril Levitt and William Shaffir would document the event. Why did scholars ignore it for so long? Neither Canada, Toronto, nor Jews were invested in rehashing such a dreadful incident. Since the appearance of The Riot at Christie Pits, however, attention to the riot has increased, and its legacy has been viewed in a more positive light.

L'année 2017 marque le trentième anniversaire de la parution de The Riot at Christie Pits, ouvrage qui fait la chronique des événements du 16 août 1933, jour où la ville de Toronto fut le théâtre de l'une des plus violentes émeutes de l'histoire canadienne. De jeunes Juifs avaient agi en représailles contre des sympathisants nazis qui avaient déployé un drapeau portant la swastika lors d'une partie de base-ball dans ce quartier. Bien que cette émeute eût été particulièrement brutale, il fallut néanmoins attendre 54 ans pour que les chercheurs Cyril Levitt et William Shaffir documentent cet événement. Pourquoi celui-ci a-t-il été si longtemps délaissé par les historiens ? Ni le Canada, ni la ville de Toronto, ni les Juifs ne cherchèrent à se pencher de nouveau sur un si terrible incident. Cependant, depuis la parution de The Riot at Christie Pits, cette émeute a davantage attiré l'attention, et ses retombées sont dorénavant vues sous un jour plus positif.

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IT HAS BEEN 30 years since the 1987 publication of Cyril Levitt and William Shaffir's illuminating book, *The Riot at Christie Pits*.¹ The work chronicles the events of August 16, 1933, when Toronto was the site of one of the most violent riots in Canadian history. In a climate of pervasive anti-semitism, and following weeks of hooligans hurling anti-Jewish epithets and brandishing swastika banners, young Jewish men retaliated after Nazi sympathisers unfurled a large swastika flag at an evening baseball game in Willowvale Park (otherwise known as Christie Pits). For the next six hours, thousands of male Jewish and gentile teenagers attacked each other in an unprecedented clash that injured scores on both sides. Despite these exceptional and brutal circumstances, however, 54 years would pass before scholars, namely Levitt and Shaffir, professors of sociology at McMaster University, would document the uprising. Why had scholars largely ignored the incident—known for years as “Canada’s only race riot”²? Neither Canada, Toronto, nor Jews, all of whom sought to maintain or acquire a more favourable public image, were invested in rehashing an event that reflected on them so poorly. Since the volume’s appearance, however, interest in the riot has grown, and it is viewed in a more positive light: as a stepping stone on the path toward multiculturalism and as part of the collective consciousness of Canadian Jews.

In the sweltering summer of 1933, tensions between gentile and Jewish teens had been running high. Against the backdrop of virulent anti-semitism in very Protestant Toronto, where Jews were restricted from a variety of neighbourhoods, professions, and clubs, signs openly marked places in the Beaches district which prohibited Jews. Groups of Nazi supporters donning swastikas paraded through this area, seeking to deter Jewish families from visiting the beach. Despite warnings from the mayor to suspend such tactics, Nazi sympathizers, consisting largely of local hoodlums, continued their intimidation, spreading rumours of an impending anti-semitic incident, appearing at local baseball games in which Jewish teams were playing, and jeering the Jewish athletes.

On August 16, during a well-attended evening game at Christie Pits, just north of Bloor Street between Christie and Shaw streets, hostilities reached a crisis. As crowds cheered the St Peter’s Church team and the predominantly Jewish Harbord Playground team, a small group of young men on a hill within sight of the spectators unfurled a large banner with a swastika emblem and raised their arms in a Nazi salute. When the Jewish youths in the stands saw the offensive scene, they rushed the sign and attacked the young men. For the next several hours,

- 1 Canadian journalist Robert Fulford wrote the Foreword for the book. He grew up in the 1930s and 1940s in the Beaches (now ‘Beach’) area, which looms large in the backstory of the riot. He is quoted in this article’s title. See Robert Fulford, “Foreword,” in Cyril H. Levitt and William Shaffir, *The Riot at Christie Pits* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987), p. x. And see below, note 78, about a forthcoming new edition.
- 2 Sheldon Kirshner, “Spotlight on Canadian Racism,” *Canadian Jewish News*, Dec. 10, 1987, p. 8. By 1987, Christie Pits had not been Canada’s “only race riot.” In fact, several riots preceded it. In 1784, in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, for example, white Loyalists brutally assaulted black Loyalists. In the 1830s, in Bytown (Ottawa), violence regularly erupted between Irish and French-Canadian labourers. In 1887, in Vancouver, approximately 300 whites overran the Chinese shanty town of Coal Harbour. And in 1907, whites in Vancouver stormed Chinatown and “Japtown.” For a more detailed discussion of these events, see Tony Atherton, “Black Day in July,” *Ottawa Citizen*, July 21, 2007, p. B1.

and into the early morning, hundreds, if not thousands, of Jews and gentiles, brandishing baseball bats, lead pipe, and tire irons, battled each other in the park and surrounding streets and alleys. Although, shockingly, there were no fatalities, many rioters were injured in a melee the likes of which Toronto had never before seen.

A Historiographical Vacuum, 1933-1987

As sociologists Levitt and Shaffir pointed out in their Introduction, secondary historical sources about the 1930s, and about Jews or anti-semitism in Toronto and Canada, said virtually nothing about the riot, despite extensive press coverage in August 1933 by Toronto's several daily newspapers.³ Two noteworthy exceptions were Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf: Fascist Movements in Canada in the Thirties* (1975), and Stephen A. Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937* (1979).⁴

Secondary sources about collective violence⁵ appearing before 1987 also overlooked the riot. The 1986 book *Public Violence in Canada, 1867-1982*, for example, made no reference to the clash, even in a section on "Ethnic and Religious Groups," which mentioned anti-semites in Montreal who destroyed the windows of Jewish shops in 1942.⁶

Curiously, Levitt and Shaffir offer no explanation for this historical neglect, but some likely reasons all suggest the positive image that Canada, Toronto, and the Jewish community each desired for itself. First, there was a prevailing assumption that Canadians did not engage in collective violence. Historians had idealized Canada as a "peaceable kingdom," especially in contrast to the United States, where violence erupted more often and more fervently.⁷ This romanticized notion of Canada began to abate in the 1960s, when historians increasingly responded to domestic political and social tumult, and became attentive to related international conflicts.⁸ But it would take about another twenty years for them to notice the riot

3 Cyril H. Levitt and William Shaffir, *The Riot at Christie Pits* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987), p. 16. For example, the riot receives no mention in Benjamin G. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada: From the Earliest Beginnings to the Present Day* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1945), Israel Medres, *Between the Wars: Canadian Jews in Transition* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1964), Stuart E. Rosenberg, *The Jewish Community in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), and Erna Paris, *Jews: An Account of Their Experience in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 1980). The daily newspapers included the *Toronto Daily Star*, the *Globe*, the *Evening Telegram*, and the *Daily Mail and Empire*. There was also the Toronto Yiddish daily, *Der Yiddisher Zhurnal*.

4 Levitt and Shaffir, *The Riot at Christie Pits*, p. 16. See Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf: Fascist Movements in Canada in the Thirties* (North York, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1975), and Stephen A. Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979). Betcherman's reference was especially significant given the book's reach into national political history, a genre discussed below. That the riot earned mention in either book was fortuitous as both were groundbreaking. Its appearance suggests that some elementary, high school, or university classrooms had been teaching it before 1987.

5 Scott W. See defines collective violence as "spontaneous or planned demonstrations and confrontations outside the political arena"; "Nineteenth-century Collective Violence: Toward a North American Context," *Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (spring 1997), p. 13.

6 Judy M. Torrance, *Public Violence in Canada, 1867-1982* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), pp. 30-31.

7 See, "Nineteenth-century Collective Violence," pp. 13-14.

8 See, "Nineteenth-century Collective Violence," pp. 15-16.

at Christie Pits, perhaps because the twentieth century presented less violence, arguably, than did the nineteenth.⁹

Moreover, the riot was an ethnic clash, which the idea of the peaceable kingdom “relegates ... to the status of mere aberrations in Canadian history,” and which undermines the modern notion of racial tolerance and multiculturalism, values that Canadians hold dear.¹⁰ This reluctance to examine ethnic conflict no doubt intensified in a post-Holocaust era because of the riot’s cadre of Nazi sympathizers, whose anti-semitic sentiments shamed and embarrassed most Canadians.¹¹ Still, however vile its Nazi association, the Christie Pits riot proved a minor skirmish as compared to the wholesale devastation of Europe.¹²

Second, notwithstanding the peaceable kingdom myth, Canada indeed witnessed some notable clashes, but, for all the turmoil of the 1933 riot, there existed the impression by some that it was, overall, a dishonourable and inconsequential event initiated by hoodlums on both sides.¹³ Far from being a “nation-building” battle premised on principles, pride, or protection, it was simply an excuse for bored and disgruntled thugs to make trouble. They included local Black and Italian boys, who, friendly with their Jewish counterparts, enjoyed thrashing the neighbourhood white-Anglo bullies and bigots.¹⁴ The mother of Earl Perrin, one of several young gentiles facing criminal charges, attributed her son’s actions to his chronic unemployment, which left him too much free time in the park.¹⁵ Older men enjoying the park in the days after the riot agreed: “[I]f most of these young fellows had jobs to take up their energies, they wouldn’t be going around scrapping.”¹⁶ One swastika gang member, who, days later, hurled bricks at a couple in Riverdale Park, confirmed this connection: ““With so many of us out of work, there is nothing else we can do but come here to amuse ourselves.””¹⁷ Some gentile observers took a “boys will be boys” attitude. One police officer insisted that the unfurling of the swastika was simply a “boyish prank.”¹⁸ Mrs Perrin relayed that it was “a boyish escapade” that “really was only a lot of nonsense on the boys’ part. They hang around the park playing ball and thought they were having a lot of fun.”¹⁹ As a result of these trifling reasons for the violence, assert some, the riot inspired no shifts in bigoted attitudes or no practical

9 See, “Nineteenth-century Collective Violence,” p. 36.

10 See, “Nineteenth-century Collective Violence,” pp. 35, 34.

11 According to Ira Robinson, and in direct contrast to the historical reasons just cited, a sports event-turned-anti-semitic melee “was hardly unique to Toronto.” Similar clashes occurred in other cities, such as the 1936 attack in Regina on a Winnipeg YMHA football team, and thus might have seemed so common as to not merit historical attention. See Ira Robinson, *A History of Antisemitism in Canada* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), p. 68.

12 Paula J. Draper, Review, *Urban History Review* 17, no. 3 (Feb. 1989), p. 220.

13 “Draper Admits Receiving Riot Warning,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 17, 1933, pp. 1, 3; “What Does Toronto Want?,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 23, 1933, p. 6.

14 Levitt and Shaffir, *The Riot at Christie Pits*, pp. 184-90.

15 “More Answer Police Questions on Rioting,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 19, 1933, p. 2.

16 “Swastika Gangsters Roam in City Park,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 22, 1933, p. 3.

17 “Swastika Gang Drives Citizens from City Park,” *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 22, 1933, p. 1.

18 “Four Remanded on Riot Charges in Swastika Row,” *Evening Telegram*, Aug. 19, 1933, p. 2.

19 “More Answer Police Questions,” p. 2.

changes that served to improve relations between Jew and gentile, and thus could claim no weighty historical significance.²⁰

A third possible reason for Canada's historical neglect of the riot is the marginal status of social history until the 1960s and 1970s, including ethnic and working-class history. Canadian history had focused on the achievements of the majority white-Anglo population, particularly the upper and middle classes who comprised the political, economic, and intellectual elite.²¹ The daily experience of working-class Jews, especially as victims of anti-semitism by nativist Canadians, was not within the purview of mainstream historians, who typically shared the privileged background and world view of those whom they studied, and who most often advanced a flattering nationalist narrative.

Attention to the riot by Jewish scholars in 1987 was likely attributable not only to the much publicized rhetoric in the 1980s of Canadian Holocaust deniers James Keegstra and Ernst Zündel, but to Irving Abella and Harold Troper's ground-breaking 1982 book, *None Is Too Many*. It "created shock waves" after documenting the institutional anti-semitism in the anti-immigration policies of William Lyon Mackenzie King's government in the 1930s and 1940s.²² The book was widely regarded as a "scholarly tsunami," not only because it helped shatter the prevailing nationalist myth that Canada was an open and welcoming destination for immigrants, but because it helped affirm Jewish historical scholarship in Canada.²³ With this raised profile of Jewish Studies, the riot's ageing Jewish participants seemed emboldened to record their involvement for posterity.

For Toronto, the riot was best left ignored as it was a blemish on the city's image as "Toronto the Good." For decades, it had proudly donned the badge of white Anglo-Protestantism: much of its population was staunchly British, and "Sunday blue laws, draconian liquor legislation, and the Orange Order held sway."²⁴ Toronto was known as a deeply conservative and puritanical city where the sedate values of Christian respectability, stability, and security reigned supreme. The incident, then, "the biggest and ugliest riot in Toronto's history," was a jarring and unwelcome disruption to this image of morality and gentility and cast a shadow on a somewhat sleepy (and, to some commentators, dull and

20 Rosie DiManno, "Remembering the Riot of Christie Pits," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 10, 2013, p. A2.

21 Some classic political histories of Canada that ignore the riot include Donald Grant Creighton, *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944); J. M. S. Careless, *Canada: A Story of Challenge* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1953); Donald Creighton, *The Story of Canada* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1959); R. C. Brown and M. E. Prang, eds., *Confederation to 1949*, Vol. III (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1966); J. M. S. Careless and R. Craig Brown, eds., *The Canadians 1867-1967*, Part 1 (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1967); and Donald Creighton, *Canada's First Century, 1867-1967* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1970).

22 L. Ruth Klein, "Introduction," in Klein, ed., *Nazi Germany, Canadian Responses: Confronting Antisemitism in the Shadow of War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), p. xix.

23 Patrick Reed, "A Foothold in the Whirlpool: Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement," MA thesis, history, Concordia University, 1996, p. 7, in Antoine Burgard and Rebecca Margolis, "Introduction: An Unquestioned 'Scholarly Tsunami'?", *Canadian Jewish Studies*, 24 (2016), p. 13.

24 Harold Troper, "History of Immigration to Toronto since the Second World War: From Toronto 'the Good' to Toronto 'the World in a City,'" Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, CERIS Working Paper No. 12, March 2000, p. 2.

provincial²⁵) town.²⁶ As legal historian Philip Girard notes, “The riot at Christie Pits challenged the complacent self-image of ‘Toronto the Good’ as no event in recent memory had done.”²⁷

For Jews, collective silence about the riot in the post-war period facilitated their profound desire for assimilation/integration. Though still facing obstacles, many young Jews were increasingly successful and accepted and did not view themselves, or want others to perceive them, as an oppressed and disliked minority group. Indeed, a critical 1978 *Canadian Jewish News* editorial asked, “Are we so snug and smug that we’ve forgotten what it’s like to be a ‘greener’ [newcomer] in Canada?”²⁸ The story of Christie Pits, like that of the Holocaust, would only remind a modern, liberated generation of how recent and tenuous its status was, burdening it with the historical baggage of anti-semitism that could only hold it back.²⁹

The deep-seated image of the Jew as “*mensch*” (decent man) may also help account for the silence. He did not solve conflicts through antagonism and force, which meant that collective violence by young Jewish men was anything but a source of pride and commemoration. Entrenched in over a thousand years of Eastern European tradition,³⁰ the *mensch* was moral, kind, gentle, and studious, traits that ran counter to the aggression and physicality of Christian manliness.³¹ As Warren Rosenberg states, “[T]he historically constructed (and conflicted) definition of what it means to be a Jew has depended to a large extent on the repression of violence.”³² Though partly self-imposed through adherence to Jewish law, this repression was also inflicted for thousands of years by a dominant culture that victimized Jewish men, denying them the opportunity for citizenship and military prowess, and the connected traits of power, fitness, and physicality.³³ Unlike in other ethnic groups, masculinity in Jewish culture was not expressed through violence, but through righteousness, education, and professional success, and conflicts were to be solved with discretion and civility.³⁴

In response to the riot, the notion that Jews shunned violence prevailed. Community leader Rabbi Sachs, directing his comments in the press to Jewish participants, declared that “the Jewish population in Toronto will not countenance their action, because Jewish people do not believe in violence.”³⁵ The Jewish

25 Troper, “History of Immigration to Toronto”.

26 Estella Cohen, “In the Days before Multiculturalism,” *Toronto Star*, Aug. 16, 2008, p. AA6.

27 Philip Girard, *Bora Laskin: Bringing Law to Life* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 2005), p. 58.

28 Jeffrey R. Stutz, “Toronto Jewish Community Should Face the Spectre of Racial Intolerance in City,” *Canadian Jewish News*, Jan. 27, 1978, p. 5.

29 Perhaps this is why boxer Sammy Luftspring in his 1975 memoir makes no mention of the riot. See Sammy Luftspring with Brian Swarbrick, *Call Me Sammy* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1975).

30 Warren Rosenberg, *Legacy of Rage: Jewish Masculinity, Violence, and Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), p. 1.

31 Rosenberg, *Legacy of Rage*, p. 2.

32 Rosenberg, *Legacy of Rage*, p. 4.

33 Rosenberg, *Legacy of Rage*, pp. 19-20.

34 Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin, *Searching for My Brothers: Jewish Men in a Gentile World* (New York: Perigee Books, 1999), pp. 3-5.

35 “Swastika Feud Battles in Toronto Injure 5. Fists, Boots, Piping Used in Bloor Street War,” *Globe*, Aug. 17,

rioters, maintained the rabbi, "seem to have forgotten their religious teaching, which, above all, counsels against such violence." He suggested to the Jewish combatants "not to allow themselves to become so easily provoked."³⁶ Even one of their representatives emphasized to the press that "'we are not looking for trouble ... Last night we were waiting in readiness, but refrained from going to any of the parks until scouts reported disturbances."³⁷ Seemingly reinforcing the Jewish revulsion for violence, the Jewish rioters never fought with the police.³⁸ Moreover, the only two arrests were of gentiles; and four of the five rioters sent to hospital with potentially serious injuries were Jewish, the victims, not the perpetrators, of aggression.³⁹

Immediately following the riot, newspaper reports reflected the conflicted feelings among Jewish youths. They seemed torn between their propensity for diplomacy and their celebration of the violence, and between their self-image as victims and their reputation now as perpetrators. Both sides had advantages and disadvantages: as passive victims, they were the sympathetic targets of bigotry and violence, but they were also weak and vulnerable⁴⁰; as perpetrators, they were the tough and ethical guardians of religious tolerance, but they were also 'hoodlums' and 'trouble-makers.'

The call in the Jewish community to suspend "Jewish strong-arm tactics"⁴¹ against the gentile gangs sprang not only from religious doctrine, but also from fears of an anti-semitic backlash. Concern arose that retaliation would reflect badly on all Jews, causing "a wave of anti-Semitic feeling that would cause grave injustices to hundreds of Jewish citizens who were entirely disassociated from the recent disturbances."⁴² Mayer Steinglass, editor of the *Jewish Standard*, observed that the Jewish youths were undoubtedly well-intentioned in their actions, "but they shouldn't have adopted the methods they did."⁴³ On the whole, as the riot contravened the Jewish precepts of non-violence, and potentially invited greater anti-semitism, it seemed better left forgotten.

In contrast to the 'mensch' model of Jewish manhood, Levitt and Shaffir's 1987 book not only introduced the ethnic clash to many Canadians who had never heard of it, but emphasized the physicality, toughness, and resistance of Jews. For many Jews, these were characteristics now worth celebrating and remembering. After all, as Lita-Rose Betcherman asserted in 1975, "In their toughness," the Jewish rioters "were almost a prefiguration of the post-war Jews who founded the state of Israel."⁴⁴ Certainly, Israel's Six Day War of 1967 and Yom Kippur War of 1973 affirmed this strength and fierceness. And by the 1980s, Jews were so

1933, p. 2.

36 "To Prosecute All Who Show Swazi Emblem," *Evening Telegram*, Aug. 17, 1933, p. 2.

37 "'Die with Boots on' Jewish Boys Slogan," *Toronto Daily Star*, Aug. 19, 1933, p. 2.

38 "To Prosecute All," p. 2.

39 *Ibid.*; "Swastika Feud Battles," p. 1.

40 For example, after a gentile ruffian verbally assaulted him, one Jewish youth was severely beaten, even though he was "a well known amateur boxer." See "To Prosecute All," p. 2.

41 "To Prosecute All," p. 2.

42 "To Prosecute All," p. 2.

43 "To Prosecute All," p. 2.

44 Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf*, p. 59.

firmly a part of Canadian society, with success in virtually every professional and creative field, they could now revel in their history of opposition and defiance.

Along with the scholarly neglect of the 1933 riot in the years prior to 1987, it is worth noting that Toronto newspaper coverage was also sporadic and cursory. In June 1965, for example, when a *Globe and Mail* story reported on a fleeting, but nasty clash between Jews and neo-Nazis in Toronto's Allan Gardens,⁴⁵ it underplayed Christie Pits, asserting erroneously that "Police broke up the disturbance before anyone was seriously hurt."⁴⁶ In December 1977, a brief editorial in the *Canadian Jewish News* noted that Toronto's Pitman Report on human relations cautioned against the bigotry that incited the Christie Pits riot.⁴⁷ And in 1984, a story on the ninetieth-anniversary reunion of Harbord Collegiate Institute, a school linked to the Harbord baseball team, alluded to "the famous Christie Pits battles."⁴⁸

The Book and its Impact

Since the 1987 publication of *The Riot at Christie Pits*, the incident has received far more attention. In 1996, for example, a documentary by the same name, and based explicitly on the book, aired in prime time on the Global Television network. It too focused on the anti-semitic character of "Toronto the Good" and featured interviews with "Jewish old-timers"—participants, witnesses, or supporters of the riot, who all remembered it as a seminal event.⁴⁹ The Toronto press and local history enthusiasts, as well, have reflected on the riot's significance: many features, videos, and blogs appeared in 2013, for example, to mark its eightieth anniversary.

Novels and plays have also used the dramatic event as a backdrop. Recent works include Karen X. Tulchinsky's *The Five Books of Moses Lapinsky* (2003), Steven Hayward's *The Secret Mitzvah of Lucio Burke* (2005), Tara Goldstein's *Zero Tolerance and Other Plays* (2013), and Michael Ross Albert's *Tough Jews* (2017).⁵⁰ Inspired by family tales of the riot, the authors credit Levitt and Shaffir's

45 "Jewish Group Denies Starting Violence," *Globe and Mail*, June 2, 1965, p. 5. For more on the riot at Allan Gardens, see Frank Bialystock, *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), pp. 129-134.

46 "1933: The First Swastika Battle," *Globe and Mail*, June 2, 1965, p. 5.

47 "Striking Relevancy," *Canadian Jewish News*, Dec. 9, 1977, p. 6. The 1977 *Pitman Report*, officially titled *Now Is Not Too Late*, was the outgrowth of the Task Force on Human Relations, which was commissioned by the City of Toronto, and headed by Ryerson College president William Pitman. It was a ten-month inquiry into ethnic and racial bigotry and violence in Toronto. See Stutz, "Toronto Jewish Community," p. 5.

48 Ben Nobleman, "Harbord Reunion Attracts 2,300 People for Nostalgic Evening," *Canadian Jewish News*, July 2, 1981, p. 19.

49 *The Riot at Christie Pits* (1996), Peter Williamson, director, and Canwest producer. See, for example, Rosie DiManno, "Remembering the Christie Pits Riot," *Toronto Star*, Aug. 10, 2013, p. 1. For use of the expression "Jewish old-timers," see Draper, Review, p. 220. For "old-timers," see Morton Weinfeld, *Like Everyone Else ... but Different: The Paradoxical Success of Canadian Jews* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2001), p. 326. For more on the collective memory of the riot's "Jewish old-timers," particularly on how issues of masculinity shaped it, see my paper (publication pending) "The 'Malestrom' at Christie Pits: Jewish Masculinity and the Toronto Riot of 1933."

50 Karen X Tulchinsky, *The Five Books of Moses Lapinsky* (Toronto: Raincoast Books, 2003); Steven Hayward, *The Secret Mitzvah of Lucio Burke* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2005); Tara Goldstein, *Zero*

book as an “invaluable” information source. Tulchinsky counts it as one “of major importance to my research” in helping to “imagine my characters within these historical times.”⁵¹

A milestone in recognition of the riot is the historic plaque that Heritage Toronto erected in Christie Pits park in 2008 to commemorate the riot's 75th anniversary.⁵² The Plaque Committee historians had “laboured for a year over how to cram the disputed whale of a tale into 150 little bronze words.”⁵³ But its inscription was no more evocative than the “palpable immediacy” of its location.⁵⁴ That Heritage Toronto situated the plaque at Christie Pits reinforced the profound connection between place and memory,⁵⁵ conjuring up a contested landscape of anti-semitism and violence in the hopes of reinforcing modern lessons in cultural tolerance.

Indeed, Toronto since 1987 has framed the riot as a stepping-stone on its path toward multiculturalism.⁵⁶ As the chair of the Christie Pits Plaque Committee noted in 2008, “We have come a long way since then [1933] and now not only tolerate our diversity but are proud of it.”⁵⁷ The 1996 documentary, for example, profiled a discussion group of modern teenagers from various ethnic backgrounds who revealed their own battles with prejudice in Toronto, but learned, as the riot showed, that their struggles were rooted in a bigotry that was once far more vicious.⁵⁸ “Today,” asserted the narrator, “Toronto remains a beacon of hope to immigrants around the world.”⁵⁹ At the 80th anniversary of the riot in 2013, which featured a baseball game with local celebrities, media personalities, and politicians, an organizer noted that “we thought the commemoration should centre around a softball game as a symbol of showing just how far this city has come since the dark days of 1933; not only for the Jewish community but as a leading multicultural city in the world.”⁶⁰ Historian Cecilia Morgan maintains that the state still “finds

Tolerance and Other Plays: Disrupting Xenophobia, Racism and Homophobia in School (Toronto: Sense Publishers, 2013); Ruth Schweitzer, “Play Examines Christie Pits Riot, Immigrant Life in 1930s,” *Canadian Jewish News*, March 23, 2017, p. 39.

- 51 Tulchinsky, *The Five Books of Moses Lapinsky*, p. 493. She uses the word “invaluable”; Steven Hayward notes “the help and inspiration I received from the book.” See *The Secret Mitzvah of Lucio Burke*, p. 304.
- 52 Riot at Christie Pits Historical Plaque, http://torontoplques.com/Pages/Riot_at_Christie_pits.html
- 53 Brianna Goldberg, “A Riot’s Lasting Legacy,” *National Post*, Aug. 16, 2008, p. A10.
- 54 Brian Osborne in James Opp and John C. Walsh, eds., “Introduction,” in *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), p. 5.
- 55 See Opp and Walsh, eds., *Placing Memory, passim*. Simon Schama notes, “Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.” See Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), pp. 6-7.
- 56 See, for example, Goldberg, “A Riot’s Lasting Legacy,” p. A10; Cohen, “In the Days before Multiculturalism,” p. AA6.
- 57 Judy Stoffman, “A New Plaque Raises the Question: What to Remember?,” *thestar.com*, Aug. 9, 2008. https://www.thestar.com/news/2008/08/09/a_new_plaque_raises_the_question_what_to_remember.html
- 58 *The Riot at Christie Pits*, documentary. Cyril Levitt has indicated that although he appreciates the documentary’s contemporary promotion of cultural pluralism, he finds the approach of paralleling present and past episodes of prejudice and discrimination ahistorical due to the riot’s distinct set of historical factors. Cyril Levitt, “The 1933 Christie Pits Riot: Anti-Semitism Then and Now,” JEM [Jewish Educational Manna] Lecture Series, London, Ont., March 3, 2014.
- 59 *The Riot at Christie Pits*, documentary.
- 60 The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs organized the event. See DiManno, “Remembering the Riot,” p. A2; Steve Simmons, “80th Anniversary of the Christie Pits Riot,” *Toronto Sun*, Aug. 10, 2010. For the 84th anniversary in August 2017, a rally and community barbecue at Christie Pits hosted members from

it difficult” to incorporate the historical experiences of ethnic groups into “its preferred narratives, ones that favour large, sweeping stories of national progress and uplift and that have little room for the histories of marginalized groups.”⁶¹ This emphasis on multiculturalism, however, allows for the commemoration of local ethnic history (no matter how ugly) while simultaneously celebrating the nation’s (and Toronto’s) evolved reputation for cultural appreciation. Thus, the riot at Christie Pits becomes part of a “usable” past to underscore multiculturalism as a contemporary national and local priority.⁶²

Since 1987, the riot has become integral to the identity of the Jewish community. Indeed, scholar Arnold Ages declared in 1988 that the event “detonated powerful resonances in the Canadian Jewish psyche.”⁶³ Sociologist Morton Weinfeld asserted in 1989 that “the Christie Pits riot has assumed legendary status among Toronto’s Jews,” and historian Paula Draper agreed that same year that “the riot has become permanently embeded in their ethnic mythology.”⁶⁴ The riot for many Toronto Jews was a David-and-Goliath story in which a relatively small number of beleaguered but determined young Jewish men were able to retaliate against arrogant Nazi hoodlums and defy the evil forces of anti-semitism. In a post-Holocaust era, the riot has become retroactively infused with even deeper significance: the tragedy of the Shoah and the collective satisfaction of defeating the Christie Pits thugs in the name of six million murdered Jews.⁶⁵

Indeed, in 2004, the federal government proclaimed April 15 as Canadian Holocaust Remembrance Day, which directly and uncomfortably “ties Canadian antisemitism to the Nazi genocide.”⁶⁶ The day’s designation forms part of the government’s larger “culture of redress” in which various historically injured groups in Canada have been offered “a range of reconciliatory gestures.”⁶⁷ In 2008,

a variety of inter-faith and labour groups who, in response to recent racist violence in the United States, collectively protested “modern-day proponents of white supremacy.” See Barbara Silverstein, “Anti-Racism Protesters Gather at Toronto’s Christie Pits Park on Sunday,” *Canadian Jewish News*, Aug. 21, 2017, p. 42.

61 Cecilia Morgan, *Commemorating Canada: History, Heritage, and Memory 1850s-1990s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), p. 131.

62 Nicole Neatby and Peter Hodgins, “Introduction,” in Nicole Neatby and Peter Hodgins, eds., *Settling and Unsettling Memories: Essays in Canadian Public History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 5.

63 Arnold Ages, “First Canadian Race Riot Examined,” *Jewish Western Bulletin*, July 7, 1988, p. 5.

64 Morton Weinfeld, Review, *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 14, no. 2 (spring 1989), p. 239; Draper, Review, p. 220.

65 Levitt and Shaffir, *The Riot at Christie Pits*, pp. 200-201.

66 Morgan, *Commemorating Canada*, p. 182.

67 Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, “Introduction,” in Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, eds., *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. 6. Groups seeking redress have included Aboriginal peoples, Japanese, Italian, and Ukrainian Canadians, and victims of state-sponsored eugenic programs. Redress may include acknowledgment, apology, accommodation, and reparation. See, for example, Roy Miki and Cassandra Kobayashi, *Justice in Our Time: The Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991); Franca Iacovetta, Robert Perin, and Angelo Principe, eds., *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), part 4; and Ian Radforth, “Ethnic Minorities and Wartime Injustices: Redress Campaigns and Historical Narratives in Late Twentieth-century Canada,” in Nicole Neatby and Peter Hodgins, eds., *Settling and Unsettling Memories: Essays in Canadian Public History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 369-41.

for example, Jewish communities received funds to recognize the 900 doomed Jewish refugee passengers aboard Germany's *SS St. Louis* to whom Canada denied entry in 1939.⁶⁸ This culture of redress has a variety of shortcomings, but its attention and sensitivity to historical injustice provide necessary evidence to activist grassroots groups and liberal global communities of a nation-state's "historical reckoning."⁶⁹ Canada's culture of redress, which includes, arguably, the expanding Holocaust education curriculum in the country's elementary and high schools,⁷⁰ will no doubt help cement historically neglected events such as the riot of Christie Pits in the national collective memory.

Although popular awareness of the conflict has increased since 1987, scholarly treatment remains scanty. Ira Robinson's *A History of Antisemitism in Canada* (2015), for example, dedicates only one sentence to the riot.⁷¹ And a 2016 issue of *Canadian Jewish Studies* devoted to "New Research on Canada and the Jews during the 1930-1940s," says nothing of it at all.⁷² General narratives and university textbooks chronicling the history of Canada also refer to the riot only briefly, if at all.⁷³ And, most notably, there have been no additional monographs specifically on the topic.

This dearth of current scholarship may be due to at least three factors. First, many scholars may be sceptical of the riot's long-term impact. After all, although Toronto banned public display of the swastika symbol as a result of the 1933 conflict, anti-Semitism persisted in Toronto and throughout the country⁷⁴; indeed, it intensified in the late 1930s and the 1940s, as exemplified by Ottawa's systematic refusal to admit persecuted European Jews into Canada. With this state-sanctioned repudiation, the shame associated with the anti-semitism of the

68 Henderson and Wakeham, "Introduction," p. 6.

69 Henderson and Wakeham, "Introduction," p. 5, 7. Some shortcomings include "preoccupations with haste, the deflection of liability, and the public relations of 'saving face.'" Redress initiatives have also been "amassed inconsistently, shaped by the shifting and ambivalent domestic forces of a series of different government administrations and policy changes, partisan one-upmanship, and domestic and international political pressure." See p. 7.

70 Morgan, *Commemorating Canada*, p. 182. Education is officially, of course, a provincial concern.

71 Robinson, *A History of Antisemitism in Canada*, p. 68.

72 *Canadian Jewish Studies*, 24 (2016), see throughout.

73 Some scholarly narratives on Canada that appeared in the 1990s, for example, and that offer no reference to the riot include J.L. Finlay and D.N. Sprague, *The Structure of Canadian History*, 4th ed. (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice Hall, 1993); Desmond Morton, *A Short History of Canada*, 3rd rev. ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1997); and Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, *Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998). Some post-2002 university textbooks, for example, that are similarly silent are Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel, *Canada: A National History* (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2003), and J.M. Bumstead, *The Peoples of Canada: A Post-Confederation History* (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 2004). R. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones, and Donald B. Smith, *Destinies: Canadian History since Confederation*, 6th ed. (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2008) incorporates one sentence about the existence of swastika clubs in Toronto's Beaches area, but makes no mention of the riot. See p. 298. Alvin Finkel and Margaret Conrad, *History of the Canadian Peoples 1867 to the Present*, vol. III, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Pearson Educational Canada, 2002) provides one brief paragraph on the riot. See pp. 241-42.

74 In contrast to the notion that anti-Semitism worsened, scholar Danny Rosenberg asserts that thanks to the riot, "blatant anti-Semitic provocations disappeared." See Danny Rosenberg, "Athletics in the Ward and Beyond: Neighborhoods, Jews, and Sport in Toronto, 1900-1939," in Ralph C. Wilcox et al., eds., *Sporting Dystopias: Meanings of Urban Sport Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 148.

riot “had been buried and forgotten.”⁷⁵ Second, there may be a common perception that contemporary Jews have “made it” and that ethnic/racial conflicts involving still-oppressed groups demand more urgent scholarly attention; indeed, there are those who would be hard-pressed to even regard modern Jews as a distinct ethnic group. Third, many people may view Levitt and Shaffir’s detailed book as the “definitive” source on the topic; there are still many aspects of the incident, however, that compel further investigation and analysis.⁷⁶

Happily, a second edition of *The Riot at Christie Pits*, with a new introduction and postscript, will soon be published for a new generation of readers.⁷⁷ In it, Cyril Levitt reflects on the fact that they will be digesting the book in an entirely different way:

The reader of the account in 1987 was living in a different time—it was the heyday of multiculturalism, of prosperity, of inclusion, etc. Jews and others of a liberal bent could be smug and shake their heads in reading about the events of 1933. Today the situation is different still. We have a world-wide revival of antisemitism, and anti-Zionism is rampant in Europe, in the Middle East and especially at the UN. At the same time the Jewish community in North America is divided, perhaps the most serious division in the last hundred years ... The reader of the second edition of the book will be a lot less secure and complacent than the reader of the first edition.⁷⁸

Hopefully, this second edition, and this new—yet stubbornly familiar—uncertainty for Jews will inspire a new wave of history enthusiasts and scholars to perpetuate the story of the riot as part of Canada and Toronto’s complex ethnic past, and as a tribute to embattled Jewish youths who sought to subvert its indignities.

⁷⁵ *The Riot at Christie Pits*, documentary.

⁷⁶ The role of black and Italian combatants and supporters, for example, has largely been ignored. As critics routinely charged Levitt and Shaffir’s book with weak storytelling due to “a plodding style, poor structure, excessive repetition, and ... an inability to make the period come alive,” there is certainly room for new and improved examinations of the riot. See Cary Fagan, “Gathering of the Klans,” *Books in Canada: The Canadian Review of Books*, c. 1987, http://www.booksincanada.com/article_view.asp?id=3449. Also see Draper, Review, p. 220. Draper noted that the lack of chronological structure caused “repetition and confusion,” and she pointed to an “overabundance of detail.”

⁷⁷ New Jewish Press in Toronto scheduled release for March 2017, but the book remains unavailable in mid-September 2017.

⁷⁸ Cyril Levitt, “Postscript,” in Cyril Levitt and William Shaffir, *The Riot at Christie Pits*, 2nd ed, Foreword by Marcus Gee (Toronto: New Jewish Press, forthcoming). As this edition was not yet available before I completed this article, Cyril Levitt graciously provided me with the book’s postscript.