



Experts sought to account for what seemed like a split screen in public opinion. After all, at the very height of 1960s progressivism, Canada had replaced the use of racial categories and quotas with a colour-blind points system, formalized its refugee policy and loosened admission rules to allow more extended families.

Yet, even before stories about anti-South Asian blowback began to dominate headlines, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's Liberals had an inkling its reforms weren't landing, despite all the sunny rhetoric about Canada as a cultural "mosaic." In 1974, the federal government released a green paper on immigration to tee up the work of a special parliamentary committee and public hearings, all in the service

of passing a new immigration act.

The timing wasn't great. The 1973 OPEC oil embargo had triggered stagflation and unemployment. The political Tetris facing Trudeau was to overhaul an antiquated immigration system, re-establish administrative order, deliver labour-force goals and win re-election.

As for the attacks on South Asians, the special committee's December 1975 report devoted just three pages to the topic. While acknowledging how, during hearings, MPs and senators were told that immigrants brought infectious diseases, crime, overcrowding and slums, and also took advantage of Canadian social programs, the authors stressed there was no evidence to support those claims. "[M]isconceptions," they concluded, "abound."