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St. Laurent, Louis; Siegel, Bugsy

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■ St. Laurent, Louis

Identification   Prime minister of Canada, 1948-1957

Born   February 1, 1882; Compton, Quebec, Canada

Died   July 25, 1973; Quebec City, Quebec, Canada

Canadian minister of foreign affairs and prime minister during the 1940's, St. Laurent helped forge a greater unity in domestic politics, an increased federal role in the economy, and a new role for Canada in foreign affairs.

When Canada entered World War II, the chief task facing Canada's longest-serving prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, was to maintain national unity. French Canadians were less eager to follow Great Britain's lead in the war effort and were opposed to the prospect of conscription, which was seemingly necessary for Canada's war mobilization. In December, 1941, King made a surprising move: He appointed a fifty-nine-year-old Quebec lawyer with little previous political experience—Louis St. Laurent—to join his cabinet as minister of justice.

Cabinet Minister   The appointment of St. Laurent paid off. St. Laurent was of French-English ancestry and completely bilingual. His support of King's decision in 1944 to institute a draft for soldiers to fight

Canadian prime minister Louis St. Laurent. (National Archives)

overseas helped win acceptance from Quebecers. It also enhanced St. Laurent's reputation as a mature, forward-looking leader with appeal to both English and French Canadians. At war's end, King sent St. Laurent as the Canadian delegate to the founding conference for the new United Nations in San Francisco, reflecting St. Laurent's desire to help shape Canada's foreign affairs. In 1946, St. Laurent was appointed secretary of state for external affairs. As secretary, he undertook to advance the collective security of the Western nations in the face of the Cold War. Overcoming King's reluctance, St. Laurent arranged for Canada to participate in U.N. efforts in 1947 to stabilize the Korean peninsula.

Prime Minister In 1948, King retired from political life. St. Laurent was elected his successor as leader of the Canadian Liberal Party. On November 15, 1948, St. Laurent was sworn in as Canada's twelfth prime minister. He was reelected overwhelmingly a short time afterward, on June 27, 1949. St. Laurent's career as prime minister reflected his vision of a mod-

ern, postwar Canada, as can be seen in four areas: increased unity at home, increased economic leadership by the federal government, increased sovereignty and independence from Great Britain, and increased influence in world affairs.

St. Laurent himself symbolized the unity of the English and French cultures that made up Canada. He sought to bind Canada's vast spaces, as modern engineering and a prosperous economy enabled the knitting together of Canada's far-flung provinces. In 1948, Canada began building the Trans-Canada Highway to connect all of Canada. In 1949, he secured the entry of Newfoundland into the confederation as Canada's tenth province. St. Laurent promoted direct federal assistance to citizens through Canada's social insurance and universal pension systems.

As to sovereignty, St. Laurent sought to formalize Canada's independence from Great Britain. For example, in 1949, he elevated the status of the Supreme Court of Canada as the court of last resort by disallowing appeals to the Judicial Committee of the British Privy Council. Likewise, in the British North America Act of 1949, Canada gained limited powers to amend its own constitution, without securing the consent of the British parliament. A more sovereign Canada also looked for greater independence from Great Britain in foreign policy. With the advent of the Cold War, St. Laurent looked less to Great Britain for leadership in international affairs and more to the United States. In this period, Canada's military forces and defenses began integrated operations with those of the United States. Canada was an enthusiastic founding signatory of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April, 1949, and contributed actively to the U.N. operations when the Korean War broke out in June, 1950. St. Laurent also foresaw the unique role Canada could play as a multiethnic, prosperous former colony of Great Britain. His support for the April 28, 1949, London Declaration was crucial in helping to adapt the Commonwealth of Nations to allow inclusion for fully independent, non-English nations such as India. In Canada, full citizenship was extended for the first time to Asian Canadians.

St. Laurent is often portrayed as Canada's first modern campaigner, as he became affectionately known as "Uncle Louis" through his many appearances. St. Laurent continued to serve as prime minister until 1957. While campaigning, he would often

say, "In Canada's century, the best is yet to come." An assessment of St. Laurent as prime minister depends on what one believes about the direction the Liberal Party took the nation, but there can be little doubt that during the late 1940's St. Laurent was the leader in taking steps toward a modernized confederation.

Impact The 1940's, marked in the first half by World War II and in the second half by the Cold War, was a pivotal decade for Canada, as it was for most nations. Canada entered the decade as a largely insular confederation, obedient to Great Britain in foreign policy, and divided among English and French cultures in domestic affairs. It emerged from the decade more unified as a nation, more independent from Great Britain, and more active on the global stage. The federal government began to see itself as responsible for the Canadian economy and undertook massive infrastructure projects and increased social insurance programs. It would be too much to say that this was solely the work of St. Laurent, but perhaps it is not too much to see him as the symbol of a more confident and internationalist Dominion.

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Further Reading

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Brown, Craig, ed. *The Illustrated History of Canada.* Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2002. Collection of essays on the course of Canadian history by six Canadian historians. Lavishly illustrated.

Pickersgill, J. W. *My Years with Louis St. Laurent: A Political Memoir.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975. An inside and favorable look at St. Laurent's administration by a former Liberal Party minister and St. Laurent's closest political ally.

Thomson, Dale. *Louis St. Laurent: Canadian.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968. By St. Laurent's private secretary, a comprehensive biography based on two hundred interviews, archival research, and personal reminiscences.

Whitaker, Reg, and Steve Hewitt. *Canada and the Cold War.* Toronto: James Lorimer, 2003. Includes an account of how St. Laurent helped shift Canada to new postwar realities.

See also Canada and Great Britain; Canadian minority communities; Canadian participation in World War II; Canadian regionalism; Elections in Canada; Foreign policy of Canada; Military conscription in Canada; Newfoundland; North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

looks and extravagant persona have made him a staple of gangster mythology, best exemplified by Warren Beatty's portrayal of him in the 1991 film *Bugsy*.

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Further Reading

Carpozi, George, Jr. *Bugsy: The Bloodthirty, Lusty Life of Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel.* New York: Spibooks, 1992.

Papa, Paul. *It Happened in Las Vegas.* Guilford, Conn.: Globe Pequot, 2009.

Wilkerson, William. *The Man Who Invented Las Vegas.* Bellingham, Wash.: Ciro, 2000.

See also Chandler, Raymond; Crimes and scandals; Dewey, Thomas E.; Gambling; Jews in the United States; Organized crime.

■ Siegel, Bugsy

Identification American gangster
Born February 28, 1906; Brooklyn, New York
Died June 20, 1947; Beverly Hills, California

Although Siegel was a vicious killer, he has been glamorized for his role in launching Las Vegas as the gambling mecca of the United States.

Born Benjamin Hymen Siegelbaum to a Jewish family, Bugsy Siegel became one of the most notorious American gangsters. He earned his reputation as a tumultuous member of New York's powerful Jewish syndicate and as a hit man for the infamous contract-killing squad "Murder Incorporated." By the early 1940's, Siegel resided in Beverly Hills and threw opulent parties for Hollywood celebrities. He dressed fashionably and dated Virginia Hill.

At the behest of his syndicate boss, Meyer Lansky, Siegel investigated a desert town in Nevada—Las Vegas—that was attracting gambling developers. In 1946, Siegel muscled in on the construction of the Flamingo gambling casino owned by Billy Wilkerson. Siegel was able to push the project along but also accumulated million-dollar overruns. Rumors spread that his extravagant spending angered the syndicate bosses, who also suspected him of skimming construction money off the top. On June 20, 1947, he was shot to death by an unknown assailant.

Impact A ruthless and erratic gangster, Siegel has achieved added notoriety because of his association with the rise of Las Vegas, although his actual role in launching the city has been debated. His handsome