

## The Reasonable Accommodation Debate

### Responses to a Crisis of Perception

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#### Abstract

*This paper examines the findings of the Bouchard-Taylor report and discusses reasonable accommodation in Quebec as a crisis of perception. It highlights some of the reasons behind the crisis, including Quebec's status as a minority culture within Canada, and briefly discusses the history of interculturalism and multiculturalism in Quebec and the rest of Canada. Through an analysis of some of the specific recommendations in the report, as well as views from prominent thinkers regarding the broader issue of cultural recognition, this paper shows that, beyond Quebec, the crisis of perception raises important questions about the Canadian identity and the challenges of modern governance in the era of globalization. The new citizenship study guide is one example of a tool that addresses these challenges, by attempting to characterize core aspects of the Canadian identity and share them with prospective new citizens and Canadians alike.*

#### Introduction: The Impact of Herouxville's Declaration

"We consider that men and women are of the same value. Having said this, we consider that a woman can; drive a car, vote, sign cheques, dance, decide for herself, speak her piece, dress as she sees fit, respecting, of course, the democratic decency, walk alone in public places, study, have a job, have her own belongings and anything else that a man can do. These are our standards and our way of life. Consequently, we consider as undesirable or prohibit an action or gesture that would be contrary to the above statement such as: killing women by lapidation or burning them alive in public places, burning them with acid, excising them, infibulating them or treating them as slaves" (Herouxville 2007).

The above excerpt from Herouxville's "life standards" document made headlines around the world when the small Quebec town's values were published in early 2007. The publication of the standards exposed growing public discontent concerning the issue of reasonable accommodation, a legal notion, stemming from the basic principles of equality and fairness that have been current for about 25 years. Though the town has only 1,300 inhabitants, with very few, if any, immigrants, the publication of Herouxville's now notorious standards by the town's mayor and six city councillors marked the culmination of the reasonable accommodation crisis in Quebec. This led to Premier Jean Charest's appointment of the high-profile Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (CCAPRCD), headed by academics Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor.

In essence, reasonable accommodation limits infringement on the principle of equality, by obliging, where appropriate, the state, individuals or private enterprises to modify norms, practices and policies to take into account the needs of certain marginalized groups that generally constitute ethnic and religious minorities (Koussens 2009, 205). As such, it highlights the concept that different treatment can still be equal treatment, placing the onus on all public institutions to respect this principle. By publishing their life standards document, the residents of Herouxville were effectively rejecting this concept, suggesting that it is up to newcomers to Quebec to adapt to the province's values; if they cannot do so, they are not welcome to stay. "The standards construct the community's collective identity in ways that are positioned against several 'others,'" including immigrants, collapsing "the heterogeneous category of immigrants into a uniformly problematic and exoticized group" (Nieguth and Lacassagne 2009, 1). This "differences not welcome" stance is clearly problematic for an immigrant-receiving country like Canada. What is even more worrisome, however, is the statement's threatening implication that Quebec's identity is being eroded by newcomers, and that the crisis has reached such a troublesome point that there is no room, whatsoever, for negotiation or compromise. It is easy to understand why the Quebec government, who took the issue very seriously, moved quickly to establish a Commission to investigate the problem. The Commission's finding that the accommodation crisis is one of perception and not reality is also very interesting to note.

### **Scope and Focus of Paper**

This paper will examine the findings of the Bouchard-Taylor report in more detail. It will expose some of the reasons behind the crisis of perception, including Quebec's status as a minority culture within Canada, and briefly discuss the history of

interculturalism and multiculturalism in Quebec and the rest of Canada. Through an examination of some of the specific recommendations in the report, as well as views from prominent thinkers and academics regarding the broader issue of cultural recognition, this paper will show that, beyond Quebec, the crisis of perception raises important questions about the Canadian identity and the challenges of modern governance in the era of globalization. Attempting to characterize core aspects of the Canadian identity and share them with prospective new citizens and Canadians alike in an appropriate forum, could be one effective policy response to the crisis of perception. The paper will conclude with an examination of the new citizenship study guide recently launched by the federal government as a potential tool to do just that.

### **Context: Mandate and Methodology of the Commission**

Before discussing the crisis of perception, it is necessary to define the mandate of the Commission in more detail. As mentioned, Premier Charest publicly appointed the Commission immediately following the publication of Herouville's standards. The Herouville incident was a very public response to a series of adjustment requests made throughout Quebec, principally in the Montreal area, over the course of several months. In their report, Bouchard and Taylor describe "a time of turmoil," between March 2006 and June 2007, during which 40 cases of reasonable accommodation were reported in the Quebec media, compared to 12 cases over the previous four years. Increasingly, "part of the population reacted to the accommodation requests as though it felt wronged by what it perceived to be 'privileges'" (Bouchard and Taylor, 2008, 53). Many of those with negative judgments of accommodation practices believed that they threaten social order and the Quebecois' most basic values. At the most intense point in March 2007, reasonable accommodation was a social issue on which politicians running in the provincial election were commenting daily.

Created on February 7, 2008, the CCAPRCD's mandate, as established by Order in Council, was to: take stock of harmonization practices in Quebec, analyze the issues bearing in mind the experience of other societies; conduct an extensive consultation, and formulate recommendations to the government (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, 33). Over the course of one year, the Commission undertook an ambitious research and consultation mandate. It commissioned 13 research projects conducted by specialists from different Quebec universities, and organized 31 focus groups with individuals from different milieus in Montreal and the regions. It also held 59 meetings with experts and representatives of socio-cultural organizations, and set up an advisory committee with 15 specialists from various disciplines. In terms of reaching out to the general public, the Commission consulted extensively with ordinary citizens from all

walks of life and from all over the province to engage their thoughts on accommodation; from a citizen-engagement perspective, the Commission was a success. Bouchard and Taylor commissioned four province-wide forums in Montreal, organized by the *Institut du Nouveau Monde*, in which over 800 people participated. Hearings were held in 15 regions in addition to the Montreal area, and engaged citizens submitted over 900 briefs, which led to 241 individual testimonies. Moreover, the Commission's website received over 400,000 visits during the consultation period. Lastly, the Commission hosted 22 unrestricted evening citizens' forums in the centres where hearings were held, affording, on average, a total of 40 participants from all social backgrounds to express their opinions during each session (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, 33-37).

### **Findings: Exposing a Crisis of Perception**

After one year of substantive research and consultation, the Bouchard-Taylor Commission found that "the foundations of life in Quebec are not in a critical situation," exposing the accommodation crisis as one of perception (abridged report, 13). Findings did not reveal that there was a sudden increase in the number of adjustments that public institutions allowed, or that the operation of certain institutions was disrupted by such requests. In fact, only a very small number of the accommodation cases examined ended up before the courts. The Commission looked at 21 requests for reasonable accommodation that received extensive media coverage and seemed to fuel the most controversy. In 15 of these cases, "research revealed striking discrepancies between the facts and widespread public perceptions" (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, 53). This paper will briefly examine one of these cases – *Prenatal classes at the CLSC de Parc-Extension* (a local community service centre) – in an effort to highlight these discrepancies. The widespread perception in this particular case is that men who accompany their spouses to prenatal classes offered by the Parc-Extension community centre are excluded from the course at the request of Muslim women who are upset by their presence. In reality, the centre has organized support and information meetings that are adapted to its clientele in the neighborhood, which is very poor and comprised mainly of immigrants. Prenatal care is one of the topics discussed at those meetings. While the meeting service is used principally by immigrant women, men are not excluded from it. Evening prenatal classes designed specifically for expectant mothers and their spouses are offered at two other near-by community centres.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is a summary of one of the case studies available in the Bouchard-Taylor, p. 48-60.

The above is just one example that shows how a seemingly reasonable request can easily become misconstrued and blown out of proportion, without all of the facts. Of course, issues are rarely misinterpreted in isolation, and it is important to consider any contributing factors. In the case of the reasonable accommodation debate, it is no secret that the media played a major role in perpetuating the crisis. Tellingly, of the 73 accommodation cases inventoried in Quebec over the last 22 years, 40 occurred during a peak period known as the “time of turmoil,” from March 2006 to June 2007 (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, 53). During this period, the media exploited the slightest incidents to sustain and perpetuate negative judgments among residents of Quebec. By framing the issue of reasonable accommodation as a crisis, the media provoked negative judgments on the part of Quebecers, fuelling the controversy. A report by sociologist Maryse Potvin of the Université du Québec à Montréal blames the media for attaching more importance to commercial competition with each other than to professional ethics. According to the report, the press “ignored the overwhelming majority of accommodation cases that were settled through negotiation in favour of imaginary constructions of problems or conflicts by the press itself” and it clearly had a “will to present conflict” and seek out the “most extremist viewpoints” (Potvin, quoted in *The Montreal Gazette*, 2008). Moreover, the media made reasonable accommodation an issue in Quebec’s provincial election campaign, and repeatedly kept issues in the news for extended periods of time by seeking comment on them from politicians (*ibid*). There is no question that by sensationalizing the issue of reasonable accommodation, the media played a key role in perpetuating the crisis of perception in Quebec.

Even with all the facts, however, and a healthy awareness of the manipulative effects of media framing, how can one be certain that the notion of reasonable accommodation will not pose a significant threat to the majority culture? Is there a way to know whether a request has gone too far? Outside the scope of Quebec’s accommodation debate, Taylor has published works concerning the broader concept of recognition, in which he points out that reasonable accommodation has limits, “one has to distinguish the fundamental liberties, those that should never be infringed and therefore ought to be unassailably entrenched, on one hand, from privileges and immunities that are important, but can be revoked or restricted for reasons of public policy” (1994, 59). Koussens agrees and defines limits to reasonable accommodation as “the reasonable character of the norm or rule, the effort required to find an accommodation, the excessive character of the requirement imposed on the employer or the institution, and infringement upon the rights of others” (2009, 206). This last point, in line with Taylor’s perspective, is perhaps the most important. The

notion of reasonable accommodation is in accordance with Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which guarantees equality rights and freedom from discrimination based on race, national and ethnic origin, and colour, it prohibits violating the rights of others, including the fundamental freedoms protected in Section 2 of the *Charter*. This means that an adjustment request that infringes on gender equality, for example, would have little chance of ever being granted. It also highlights the importance of assessing each request for adjustment on a case-by-case basis. Thus, while supported by the *Charter*, the granting of an accommodation request can in no way undermine it. It is very interesting to note similar clauses in Quebec's own Charter, which was adopted in 1975, seven years prior to the implementation of the *Canadian Charter*. In fact, Section 43 of the *Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms* explicitly states that "persons belonging to ethnic minorities have the right to maintain and develop their own cultural interests with the other members of their group" (Nugent 2006, 24). When examining the facts behind many of the high-profile cases of accommodation reported in the media between March 2006 and June 2007, it becomes clear that these requests did not undermine the *Canadian Charter* or the *Quebec Charter*, showing that they were, in fact, reasonable, and did not pose a significant threat to Quebec society.

Despite feeling threatened by newcomers, a perception expressed by an overwhelming number of Quebecers, the Commission's findings warn that the opposite is actually true in many cases. The danger is not the threat that the group requesting adjustments poses to the majority, but it is actually more dangerous, and highly discriminatory, for the majority to be blind to difference all together (Taylor 1994, 43). "Due recognition," Taylor argues, "is a vital human need," substantiated by "the politics of equal dignity and universal human potential" (1994, 41). Here, he refers to the potential for forming and defining one's own identity, as an individual, and also as a culture. This potential must be respected equally in everyone. In the same vein, Kymlicka links accommodation requests to polyethnic rights that protect specific religious and cultural practices necessary for the survival of certain minority groups that may not be adequately supported by existing legislation (1995, 38). Kymlicka addresses the unfounded fear of some that "polyethnic rights impede the integration of immigrants by creating a confusing half-way house between their old nation and citizenship in the new one" (1995, 178). Interestingly, he depicts polyethnic rights as a desire for "inclusion, which is consistent with participation in, and commitment to, the mainstream institutions that underlie social unity," building the case for reasonable adjustment, for the sake of integration, wherever possible (ibid). By stating, in general terms, that it is possible to "accept a wide range of group-

differentiated rights for minority ethnic groups, without sacrificing a core commitment to individual freedom and social equality,” Kymlicka indirectly shows that reasonable accommodation is possible, and favourable, which substantiates the view of the accommodation crisis in Quebec as one of perception rather than reality (1995, 126).

### **Quebec as a minority culture within Canada and North America**

Now that the issue of reasonable accommodation in Quebec has been exposed as a problem of perception, this paper will take a brief look at the role of Quebec’s minority status in the fabrication of the crisis. For Quebecers of French-Canadian descent, the combination of their majority status in Quebec and their minority status in both English-speaking Canada and North America is not easy. Quebec’s status as a “nation within a nation” was recognized by a House of Commons motion in November 2006, and while the term “nation” is used here in the cultural-sociological rather than the legal sense, the statement is indeed indicative of Quebec’s special status in Canada. In order to understand Quebec’s minority status and its impact on attitudes to newcomers, it is first necessary to briefly examine the evolution of the Quebec identity over the past few decades.

In the middle of the last century, Quebec experienced a major transformation, and French Canadian identity shifted from its basis in ethnicity and religion towards secularism and modernism. After the transformation, commonly known as the Quiet Revolution, took place, a “new national identity emerged that was defined territorially and linguistically,” built around the idea of “inclusiveness and openness” (Nieguth and Lacassagne 2009, 8). This was in stark contrast to the former identity, firmly entrenched in the idea of a “French-Canadian ‘race’ that was Catholic, French and white” (ibid). This shift towards inclusiveness and openness laid the foundation for interculturalism, which is widely known as the province’s interpretation of Canada’s multiculturalism policy. While multiculturalism stipulates that all cultures and civilizations are of equal value and should be treated and promoted equally within the same nation, interculturalism develops a common civic culture based on the values of freedom and liberty, and of human rights, while encouraging interaction between the communities living in the same country. While people have the right to maintain an affiliation with their ethnic group and the right to display cultural and religious differences in the public domain, the entire society must adhere to the same constitution of fundamental rights and obligations, with no exception (Nugent 2006, 24). Multiculturalism, on the other hand, advocates extending equitable status to distinct ethnic and religious groups without promoting any specific ethnic, religious, and/or cultural community values as central (ibid, 25). Not surprisingly, in their report,

Bouchard and Taylor depict Quebec's 'intercultural challenge' as a question of balancing the integration of immigrants into a French-speaking society with reasonable accommodation for ethnic and religious differences (ibid, 116). While acknowledging the complexity of this public policy, they recognize its special role in achieving that balance.

Though it clearly advocates a balance that is difficult to achieve, one wonders how, with a progressive public policy like interculturalism, Quebecers could muster so much negativity toward newcomers. How can this contradiction be reconciled? One must keep in mind that, though the Quebec identity has evolved and blossomed over time, it remains a minority culture in an English-speaking continent. Incidents such as the Herouxville declaration show that the psyche of many residents is still very much marked by "fears of the 'Other'" (Nieguth and Lacassagne 2009, 10). These fears "play into the notion of a 'Self' whose very identity is under threat and therefore needs to be protected all the more vigorously" (Nieguth and Laccassagne 2009, 10). This sentiment is summarized in a quote from Solonge Fernet-Gervais, Herouxville's oldest citizen: "In Quebec, we didn't resist the English and fight throughout our history to defend our identity, just to have Muslims dictate to us how we ought to live!" (ibid).

In addition to entrenched fears of the "Other," many Quebecers express disdain for multiculturalism in general, which they see as "fragmenting and foreign" (Nugent 2006, 25). Despite obvious similarities between multiculturalism and interculturalism, the former policy's lack of recognition of any values or principles as central is often considered "weak" and "speaks to the larger perception of Canada as a nation that either does not know itself, or is not a nation at all" (ibid). Moreover, federal multiculturalism policy, pioneered by Prime Minister Trudeau in 1971, is widely seen as "an attempt to reduce the Quebecois nation to one among many other ethnic and cultural groups and to deny its distinctive status" (Nieguth and Laccassagne 2009, 13). In other words, official multiculturalism for many Quebecers involves a notion of Canada that excludes any national recognition of Quebec, and, as such, the policy is viewed as a challenge to the promotion of their distinct identity.

After this look at Quebec's complex history as a minority culture within Canada, one can understand why negative attitudes towards newcomers may be more prevalent in Quebec, and why seemingly reasonable requests for accommodation may be considered as major threats to Quebec's culture. However, it is also possible to see how, with stronger promotion and awareness of interculturalism among Quebecers, the province could be a public policy leader in immigrant integration, while both sustaining and enhancing its identity.

## Report Recommendation: Interculturalism Going Forward

Looking to the future, one of the major pitfalls that Bouchard and Taylor advise French-speaking Quebec to avoid is the temptation to “succumb to fear, to withdraw and reject, or to don the victim’s mantle.” It must reject, at all costs, “the scenario of inevitable disappearance” (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, 216). The reason this scenario should be rejected is because it is not a reality, nor does it have to be, when interculturalism is at play. In this vein, it is important to take stock of positive changes regarding the promotion of the French culture and language that have already taken place. While the proportion of Quebecers of French-Canadian origin is declining from 80 percent of Quebec’s population in 1901 to 77 percent in 1991, a trend that will likely continue, this decline is already being offset by the selection and contribution of French-speaking immigrants. The proportion of Quebec residents whose first language is French is now almost 80 percent (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, 86). Quebec’s immigration policy, which gives priority status to immigrants who speak French, is a successful example of interculturalism at work. Building on this success, Bouchard and Taylor conclude their report by challenging Quebecers to expand and enhance their policy of interculturalism. The “edification of a common culture” is already underway in several domains, including the use of French, the sharing of common values and memory, intercommunity initiatives, citizenship participation, artistic and literary creation, and the adoption of collective symbols (Bouchard and Taylor 2008, 202). According to Bouchard and Taylor, this “identity must be able to develop as a citizen culture,” meaning “Quebecers must be able to recognize themselves in it and achieve self-fulfillment through it” (ibid). Thus, instead of passively playing the role of victim, it is up to Quebecers to empower themselves to play an active role in shaping their identity and culture, while fostering the integration of newcomers who are key to their demographic survival.

### Challenges for the Rest of Canada

Though the reasonable accommodation debate occurred in Quebec, and to a certain extent stems from its minority status as a French-speaking minority within Canada, the issue of cultural adjustment is by no means unique to Quebec, and raises important questions about the Canadian identity as a whole. While certain aspects of Quebec’s brand of interculturalism are not relevant for the rest of Canada, the core concept of building a common culture may actually bring an enhanced dimension to Canada’s multicultural policy. Pal speculates that without solidarity, or a set of principal values that are recognized as central to a country, the diversity that multiculturalism fosters can become “a scattered collection of mutually exclusive

groups,” resulting in social fragmentation (2010, 75). He discusses the challenge of balancing plurality or diversity with solidarity, and highlights that social cohesion, defined as a “sense of belonging to a community that shares values and a sense of purpose and commitment,” captures the tension between the two extremes (ibid). Pal links this tension to the broader phenomenon of globalization, appropriately categorizing the achievement of this difficult balance as one of the major modern governance challenges. Referring to the complex issues that stem from globalization and define our era of governance, he says, “these problems tend to be long term, have many causes, and enjoy no clear agreement about what a solution would look like or how it could be achieved. They do not map neatly onto the silos into which we have organized government departments. Many require behavioural change” (ibid 46). Acknowledging these challenges and taking steps to address them are thus important and integral aspects of the modern governance process. Given the complex nature of the challenge at hand—achieving a balance between plurality and solidarity, so as to address the broad concept of accommodation in Canada—perhaps the most appropriate response at this stage is simply to raise the level of public awareness of the issue and get people engaged and involved in an ongoing dialogue. This is precisely what the Government of Canada did when it launched its new citizenship study guide on November 12, 2009.

### **The Citizenship Study Guide as a Policy Response to a Crisis of Perception**

The citizenship study guide is the book that prospective new Canadians between the ages of 18 and 55 must study and be tested on before becoming citizens. The test itself is scheduled to change to reflect the new guide in February 2010. This is the first major overhaul of the guide since its creation in 1995. While the previous version of the guide featured facts about Canada’s geography and economy, it did not discuss values or institutions, and contained very little detail about Canada’s history. The new version, entitled *Discover Canada*, is a complete re-write, with substantive information about Canada’s history, symbols and institutions, as well as the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2009). The re-orientation of the guide suggests that the federal government saw an opportunity, or perhaps a responsibility, to better describe Canadian citizenship and the standards associated with it, to the 150,000 newcomers who write the citizenship test every year. On reflection, the moment that Canada turns residents into citizens is likely the most, or perhaps only opportunity to enforce the Canadian “social contract” and make prospective citizens aware of what is expected in Canada. The new guide places more emphasis on explaining how Canada’s different levels of government work (commonly defined as civic literacy) and the values that are rooted in Canadian

history (also known as civic memory).<sup>2</sup> Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, the federal government department responsible for the study guide and citizenship acquisition process stated: “For Canadian citizenship to be meaningful, it is important that Canadians share a common understanding of our rights and responsibilities, institutions and history. This is how we develop and maintain a shared sense of Canadian identity and pride in Canada” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2009).

The new guide focuses not only on Canada’s accomplishments and heroes—it also showcases darker periods, such as Aboriginal residential schools, the Chinese Head Tax and the internment of Japanese and Eastern European immigrants during two World Wars, and it does so with forthright language. On the other hand, many important elements are left out completely or not sufficiently addressed, such as gay marriage and the environment, for example. Though *Discover Canada* has received a considerable amount of press coverage on these points, one section in particular has been the subject of overwhelming discussion. This is the explicit reference to the behaviours and practices that Canada does not tolerate, under any circumstances. The text under the “gender equality” rubric reads as follows: “In Canada, men and women are equal under the law. Canada’s openness and generosity do not extend to barbaric cultural practices that tolerate spousal abuse, ‘honour killings,’ female genital mutilation, or other gender-based violence. Those guilty of these crimes are severely punished under Canada’s criminal laws” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2009, 9). Many media outlets and public figures commented on the insertion, some applauding it— including, interestingly, The Canadian Race Relations Foundation—while others criticized its inappropriateness, and many merely showed surprise at this departure from normal government speak. “For the first time,” the Toronto Star’s national affairs columnist, Chantal Hebert, pointed out on November 16, 2009, “a federal government spells out limits to Canada’s cultural tolerance and uses uncharacteristically strong language to do so.” On November 13, La Presse reported that the mayor of Herouville, Bernard Thompson, lauded the inclusion of the statement as a “rewards for our efforts of 2007.” This endorsement, naturally, stresses the obvious similarities between this declaration and the one published by the town of Herouville two years earlier, and raises the question as to whether the inclusion is informative and effective, or inappropriate and unfair.

Given the context in which the gender equality statement appears, one might lean towards the former. The gender equality statement is part of the section on rights and

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<sup>2</sup> This information is available at [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca).

responsibilities of Canadian citizenship, which briefly discusses the origins of Canadian law, highlights key components of the *Charter*, and showcases the main responsibilities of Canadian citizenship, such as obeying the law, voting in elections and helping others in the community. Given a context focused on laws and obligations, the gender equality inclusion becomes more relevant. In fact, the guide is precisely the place to instruct applicants on their responsibilities under Canadian law—and that Canada expects all citizens, whether they are native-born or immigrants, to respect its democratic and equality values. It is also important to keep in mind Canada’s high naturalization rate—85 percent of the yearly cohort of 250,000 permanent residents who enter Canada eventually become citizens,<sup>3</sup> which means they are all exposed to the study guide through the citizenship acquisition process. The broader objective of the study guide as a tool to inform thousands of prospective new Canadians about life in Canada clearly contributes to the relevance factor, whereas, for a town with no immigrants, Herouxville’s declaration looks increasingly like a publicity stunt. This leads to the obvious conclusion that, though clearly inflammatory, the content of Herouxville’s “life standards” document is less problematic than the lack of context around its publication. Shortly after the guide’s release, Minister Kenney, on the November 20, 2009, episode of TVO’s *The Agenda* said “Multiculturalism isn’t cultural relativism; while it embraces what is best about cultural diversity, it has limits.” And clearly stating those limits ensures that everyone, Canadians and newcomers alike, are on the same page.

The citizenship study guide is a tool for communicating expectations and norms to prospective new citizens. But what about established Canadians? After all, while the crisis of perception concerns newcomers, it stems largely from misconceptions among established Canadians. Helping “old stock” Canadians to become more civically literate at the same time as their newcomer counterparts could go a considerable distance in abolishing the crisis of perception. Minister Kenney freely admits this when quoted in a November 12 *Globe and Mail* article; “I’m frankly more concerned about historical amnesia and civic illiteracy amongst native-born Canadians than I am about immigrants who become Canadians.” Accordingly, the federal government is working to make the guide available to schools, libraries and other educational forums, as a starting point.

Even if one does not necessarily agree with the way in which the Canadian story has been told in the study guide, the act of defining it and sharing it, in clear, forthright language, is both opportune and appropriate. Through its “commitment to establish a

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<sup>3</sup> This information is available at [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca).

sense of identity through a new citizenship,” Andrew Cohen describes the guide in the *Edmonton Journal* as “an antidote to the culture of amnesia and ignorance that has contributed to the incredible lightness of being Canadian” (November 22, 2009). *Discover Canada* engages citizens and newcomers alike, raising public awareness, and engendering open dialogue about what it means to be Canadian. As mentioned earlier, this discussion is an important first step in addressing the challenges of modern governance.

### **Conclusion: Final Reflections**

Through an examination of the findings of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences, this paper has discussed reasonable accommodation in Quebec as a crisis of perception. It has highlighted some of the reasons behind the crisis of perception, including Quebec’s status as a minority culture within Canada, and briefly discussed the history of interculturalism and multiculturalism in Quebec and the rest of Canada. Through an examination of some of the specific recommendations in the report, as well as views from prominent thinkers and academics regarding the broader issue of cultural recognition, this paper shows that the crisis of perception raises important questions about the Canadian identity and the challenges of modern governance in the era of globalization, beyond the Quebec example. The new citizenship study guide is one tool that addresses these challenges, by attempting to characterize core aspects of the Canadian identity and share them with prospective new citizens and established Canadians alike. Encouraging both established Canadians and newcomers to become more civically literate could go a long way in preventing another crisis of perception around the reasonable accommodation of cultural minority groups. Whether or not readers agree with everything in the guide, they can concur that it boldly tells a story of Canada, in forthright language, that was previously left untold to prospective new Canadians. And although the guide identifies Canada as a multicultural nation, the spirit of interculturalism is evident through the simple telling of the compelling Canadian narrative.

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