

There are some strong and divergent feelings about Canadian multiculturalism. Our Committee generally agrees with the views expressed by these witnesses:

Canada is perceived as the prototype of the first multicultural nations... I think the whole world is watching us from that perspective...

In the past, Canada has examined the American model of the melting-pot culture. The problem is, that when you melt down traditional cultural identities, you often melt down the whole concept of cooperative society.
— George MacDonald, Director, Canadian Museum of Civilization (Issue 7:7, 18).

...78 percent of Canadians believe that multiculturalism enriches Canadian culture. Despite the rising voices of the critics of the Multiculturalism Policy, support for this very Canadian ideal remains high. A significant majority see multiculturalism as an enriching factor in our society. They also understand this to be a policy and an ideal that is aimed at respect and tolerance, at sharing and exchanging, and at integrating and building the Canadian identity. — Canadian Ethnocultural Council, Brief, p. 2.

Other perspectives, while advanced with the best of intent and intellectual integrity, were nonetheless dramatically different, and saw multiculturalism as a detriment to Canadian cultural development at best, and an obstruction to it at worst:

...it is quite possible to come here as an immigrant now, and never get a lick of the Canadian experience. ... You really don't have to participate in Canadian culture. You can live here for years without doing so. — Christopher Marston, Executive Director, Canadian Actors' Equity Association (Issue 4:30).

...untold millions of dollars are being invested to encourage countless new Canadians to turn back to their native backgrounds and traditions — traditions of a country they have left behind to start a new life in Canada. In my opinion, it is a policy that asks them to turn their backs on the concept of a shared Canadian identity, a policy that says embrace your past, but not your present or future. ... I would say that multiculturalism is a relic of the past that should be cast aside in order to support the principle of one vision and one Canada. — Brian Robertson, President, Canadian Recording Industry Association (Issue 4:5).

The Committee clearly subscribes to a more enlightened approach to a free society. There are many cultural groups in Canada who hold dearly to a strong sense of identity by maintaining their own linguistic and cultural heritage. They do so without compromising national unity in any way. While it is true that Canada has not always shown the greatest respect for its ethnocultural groups (as shown by the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II), we believe that Canada has learned to be more compassionate and trust that such tragedies will never be repeated. In our view, diversity within unity, hospitality, openness, respect and tolerance, and the promotion of a sense of belonging, are the foundations of the modern Canada.