From “Peaceable Kingdom” to “Warrior Nation”: A comparative analysis of the Liberal and Conservative citizenship study guides

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FROM “PEACEABLE KINGDOM” TO “WARRIOR NATION”: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE CITIZENSHIP STUDY GUIDES

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ABSTRACT
The Canadian citizenship study guide is a tool provided to immigrants to ensure success in the mandatory test that newcomers must pass to acquire Canadian citizenship. The guide is published by the federal government and emphasizes the key information the government deems necessary for immigrants to know. It enforces a representation of Canada based on the governing party’s idealized vision of Canada’s past and present. It also allows for the possibility for immigrants to utilize this tool to develop a strong platform for identity in Canada. However, over the past decade as the governing party has changed from Liberal to Conservative there has been a transformation in how Canada is represented as a nation within these study guides. This article will offer an analysis of the similarities and differences between the 2005 Liberal citizenship study guide, *A Look at Canada*, and the 2011 Conservative study guide, *Discover Canada*. This examination will demonstrate a shift representation from Canada as a “peaceable kingdom” under the Liberal government to the country as a Conservative “warrior nation”. Although the citizenship guides do share some similarities, a focus on the sections dedicated to history and national symbols present clear discrepancies between how each governing party presents Canada nationally and internationally to immigrants.

KEYWORDS
Citizenship; peaceable kingdom; warrior nation; representations
Once accepted as a potential Canadian citizen, new immigrants are required to pass a citizenship test to affirm their knowledge about their new country. One of the tools provided to newcomers to ensure success in this area is the Canadian citizenship study guide – a document published by the federal government designed to highlight and discuss the key information the government party in power deems necessary to know in order to successfully integrate into Canadian society. This study guide enforces a representation of Canada to recent immigrants based on the governing party’s idealized vision of Canada’s past and present. Additionally, there is the possibility for newcomers to utilize this tool to develop a strong platform for identity in their new nation. However, over the past decade, there has been a significant shift in how Canada has been represented as a nation within these study guides. This varying depiction of the nation allows us to ask what is the dominant representation of Canada in the current citizenship study guide, and how has this representation transformed from previous representations of Canada?

After the Conservative Party came to power in 2006, Stephen Harper’s government published Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship in 2009.\(^1\) It is clearly stated on the Citizenship and Immigration Canada website that this is the only official study guide for the citizenship test. It should be the primary resource for any citizenship applicant, and using any other material to prepare for the test is at the applicant’s risk (“Discover Canada” 2013). With this official position, it is evident that the governing party truly believes that the information in this guide is the most representative of the country and contains the necessary knowledge to successfully become a Canadian citizen.

This study guide was meant to act as an updated version of the Liberal Party’s A Look at Canada, originally published in 1995, with its most recent edition released in 2005.

\(^1\) A second edition of Discover Canada was published in 2011 which will be the version used for this analysis.
The Liberal citizenship guide reflected the widely-recognized image of Canada as a “peaceable kingdom.” For most of the last fifty to sixty years, Canada has been acknowledged as an “open and welcoming country, one in which a mythology of rescue, human generosity and the possibility of starting anew flourished because the idyllic story has mostly been true” (Richler 34). *A Look at Canada* emphasizes a history of multiculturalism and tolerance — a history it claims reaches back to the country’s foundations. There is little mention of armed conflict, and even less information about the colonial tendencies of Canada’s past. Although it may be a skewed version of Canadian history, it is nonetheless representative of the regularly-accepted mythology that Canada is a peacekeeping nation.

However, since the Conservative Party of Canada came to power, there has been an ongoing debate that the government has been emphasizing Canadian military history and the nation’s monarchical ties in an attempt to rebrand the image of the country as a whole. This strays from the idea of Canada as the “peaceable kingdom” and stresses the newfound discourse of Canada as a “warrior nation” (McKay and Swift 2012). In essence, a shift has occurred away from the notion that Canada is a nation that peacefully pursues international affairs and public dialogue, and Canada is instead currently experiencing what Ian McKay refers to as the “reconceptualization of Canada campaign” (McKay 2011).

This movement aims to militarize the understanding of Canada’s past and present as a whole in a Conservative effort to “teach history properly;” (Taube 2013), which has involved establishing military conflicts as significantly-defining features of the nation.²

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² As recently as April 2013, The Standing Senate Committee on Canadian Heritage and Harper’s Conservatives launched an official federal review of Canadian history. The Minutes of Proceedings state that Committee should undertake “a thorough and comprehensive review of significant aspects
This article offers a comparative analysis of the 2005 Liberal and 2011 Conservative citizenship study guides to provide an in-depth examination of the information each governing party considered to be necessary to know to become a Canadian citizen. This shift in representation from Canada as a “peaceable kingdom” to the country as a “warrior nation” will be presented as evidence of the Conservative government’s national rebranding agenda, which includes introducing new Canadians to a Conservative narrative that differs greatly from earlier representations of Canada. Before analyzing the differences between both guides, focusing primarily on the chapters dedicated to history as well as the sections on symbolism for ease of comparison, the article will conduct a review of the similarities between the Conservative and Liberal versions. Discussing the similarities between both guides shows permanencies in the representations of Canada and that there are core values that each believe are characteristic of the nation. Although the citizenship guides do share some similarities, the following paper will explore the differences of the citizenship guides and the meaning and motivation for this. Finally, a textual analysis of Discover Canada and A Look at Canada will provide a clear portrayal of the shift in the traditional interpretation of Canada as a “peaceable kingdom” under the Liberal government to its current representation as a Conservative “warrior nation”.

Parallels Within A Look at Canada and Discover Canada

Although in many ways, Discover Canada and A Look at Canada appear to be in direct opposition to each other, the guides do share limited similarities. Each begins by providing further information on how to apply for citizenship and listing in Canadian history” including World War I, with an emphasis on battles such as Vimy Ridge, World War II, the Korean conflict and the Afghanistan conflict. (Parliament of Canada - The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Minutes of Proceedings: April 29, 2013)
suggestions for successfully passing the test, such as: “call a local school or school board, a college, a community centre, or a local organization that provides services to immigrants and ask for immigration on citizenship classes,” and “take classes if you need to learn to speak English or French” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Discover Canada 6; CIC, A Look at Canada 2005 5). Both the Liberal and Conservative versions have a substantial portion dedicated to significant events in Canadian history, and certain prominent cultural and political national symbols are acknowledged by Discover Canada and A Look at Canada. For example, both guides list the maple leaf and the Parliament Buildings as symbols that are significant to the country. However, while the Liberal guide notes that the maple leaf has been a symbol of Canada since 1700, and appears on the national flag and the penny, the Conservative guide states maple leaves “appeared on Canadian uniforms and insignia since the 1850s, and are carved into the headstones of our fallen soldiers buried overseas and in Canada,” (Discover Canada 38) oddly making no mention of the fact that the maple leaf is the central image of the Canadian flag. Furthermore, when discussing flags in Canada as noteworthy symbols, the Conservative guide reinforces that the red-white-red pattern of the current Canadian flag was derived from the flag of the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario and that “the Union Jack is our official Royal Flag,” (Discover Canada 38) a clear affirmation of a strong relationship between Canada and Britain.

Each guide includes a section outlining the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship. Though this chapter appears much later in A Look at Canada than in Discover Canada, they share the same descriptor in that the rights and responsibilities of Canadians are “based on Canadian laws, traditions and shared values” (A Look at Canada 38; Discover Canada 8). Both list the basic rights that Canadian citizens have: mobility rights, equality rights, legal rights and freedom of
thought, speech, religion, expression and peaceful assembly. In addition, both name similar responsibilities, including: voting in elections, helping others in the community and obeying the law. However, while *A Look at Canada* credits only *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as being the document which defines and legally protects the rights of every Canadian, *Discover Canada* first and foremost acknowledges the signing of the Magna Carta, roughly eight hundred years ago in England, as the founding tradition of liberty in Canada. *Discover Canada* then follows with a discussion of the 1982 charter. While this emphasis may be appealing to Anglo-Canadians, it gives relatively no credit to French Canadians, Aboriginal peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) or any other ethnic or racial minority who may believe themselves entitled to representation in the narrative of Canada’s past, especially in the establishment of a set of rights and freedoms rooted in the constitution (McKay and Swift 287). Nevertheless, one could argue that this reluctance to give more recognition to *The Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and to instead emphasize the Magna Carta is representative of the traditional ties between Canada and Britain that the Conservative government appears so willing to accentuate.

The structure of each guide is fairly similar, both discussing Canadian history, symbols, geography, economy, the justice system and governmental structure. Despite these similarities, however, there are staggering differences in how Canada is portrayed overall by each study guide. It is through looking at these differences that the clear shift from the “peaceable kingdom” to “warrior nation” can be traced.

**Contrasting Representations**

The most prominent difference between *A Look at Canada* and *Discover Canada* is the underlying branding campaign each ruling government uses to promote immigration to this country. Daniel Francis’ *Selling Canada* highlights that the Canadian government
has used branding and propaganda campaigns since the late 1800s to bring tourists and immigrants to this country in the early stages of its development. These branding campaigns have continued through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but the capacity by which they are portrayed has changed numerous times. Richard Nimijean suggests that under the Liberal government the slogan of the “Canadian Way” became engrained in federal public policy debate and discourse. This was used to distinguish Canada in an increasingly globalized world, and to link this distinction to positive Canadian values (Nimijean 28). One of these positive values was the myth of peacekeeping – a branding strategy that the Liberal government actively helped construct (Wagner 47). This is evident in the chapter “What Does Canadian Citizenship Mean?” in A Look at Canada, where it is clearly stated that Canadians “are proud of the fact [they] are a peaceful nation. In fact, Canadians act as peacekeepers in many countries around the world” (A Look at Canada 7). This peacekeeping image is repeatedly displayed in A Look at Canada, without a single image of a Canadian solider to be found throughout the guide.

However, as previously discussed, the current Conservative government has been rebranding Canada as a more militaristic nation, a campaign that “reveals a link between the flexing of Canada’s new ‘brand masculine’ muscle at home and abroad” (Rankin 258).

This image of Canada as “The True North Strong and Free” is further supported by Prime Minister Harper himself, as this reconceptualization has resulted in his “reinvention as the poster boy for Canadian masculinity” (Rankin 265). As McKay and Swift note in Warrior Nation, the citizenship study guide is one of the most widely-circulated statements about the country, and its current version heavily emphasizes that Canada’s past and present is, in large part, about war.
It is further argued that “nowhere was the regime’s Warrior Nation vision of a new image for Canada clearer [than] in the glossy pages of *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship,*” and that the Conservative guide “could have just as well been called *The Beginners Guide to the Warrior Nation*” (15). One of the most notable examples of this can be seen in the “Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship” section of *Discover Canada,* where it is suggested that serving in the regular Canadian Forces, though not compulsory, “is a noble way to contribute to Canada and an excellent career choice” (8). This quotation is only one of many demonstrating the warrior nation branding strategy that the Conservative government promotes in the study guide. The remainder of the article will highlight the contesting representations that the Liberal and Conservative governments present in their sections dedicated to history and national symbols within each study guide.

**A Peaceable History or a Warrior Past?**

The most striking example of this “warrior nation” representation can be found in the history section of *Discover Canada.* The Conservatives place a greater emphasis on Canada’s past than the Liberal party, including ten pages of history in *Discover Canada* compared to only two within *A Look at Canada.* The variances in page length alone are one example of how much more heavily Canada’s past is emphasized in the Conservative edition of the study guide. The monumental historical moments listed in *A Look at Canada* include Confederation (and the dates when the provinces and territories joined Confederation), the Constitution, and the origin of the name Canada. These moments all represent the unification of the country and are clear examples of social history, a branch of history that studies ordinary people and social movements of the past.
By contrast, throughout the entire history section, there is no mention of the military or armed conflicts of Canada’s past, thereby allowing *A Look at Canada* to maintain the image of Canada as “the peaceable kingdom” in its history section.

In *Warrior Nation*, McKay and Swift argue that “Canada’s deepest meaning lies within its loyalty to the Anglosphere;” (17) and this is evident in the history chapter of *Discover Canada*. It has been suggested that the history included in *Discover Canada* is “discretely racialized” as the history it discusses begins only with the arrival of Europeans (McKay and Swift 18). In its opening passages, *Discover Canada* proudly boasts that newcomers “are becoming part of a great tradition that was built by generations of pioneers before you …. For 400 years, settlers and immigrants have contributed to the diversity and the richness of our country, which is built on a proud history and a strong identity” (3). Any history involving peoples who lived in Canada before 1600 AD, aside from a brief mention of Icelandic Vikings, is excluded from this narrative. It is briefly mentioned that when Europeans first arrived, many regions were occupied by Aboriginal peoples. The Conservative guide indicates that the arrival of Europeans changed the native way of life forever, but does not go into great detail about the history of Canada’s First Nations (14). This is problematic because it does not recognize the specific ways in which Europeans influenced the native way of life, both positively and negatively. While it is commendable that *Discover Canada* comments on the fact that, along with European settlement came European diseases to which the Aboriginals lacked immunity and therefore died from, the guide quickly moves to emphasize that “Aboriginals and Europeans formed strong economic, religious and military bonds in the first 200 years of coexistence which laid the foundations of Canada” (14). This technique of gingerly addressing a negative aspect of Canadian history, and then quickly matching it to a more positive note, is used regularly around Aboriginal issues in Canadian history (McKay and Swift 18).
An example is in the section entitled “Who We Are” in Discover Canada, which briefly acknowledges the hardships faced by Aboriginal students at residential schools, but then quickly moves on to state that today, “Aboriginal peoples enjoy renewed pride and confidence” after Ottawa formally apologized to former residential school students in 2008 (14). However, though Discover Canada only hastily acknowledges these conflicts, A Look at Canada does not address them at all.

What is particularly interesting in Discover Canada’s history section is the events the Conservative government deems to be pivotal are armed conflicts which accentuates Canada’s past as a militaristic nation. On pages filled with paintings of epic battles, images of war heroes and historical propaganda posters, it appears that “the Wars essentially shape the entire Canadian twentieth century, with minor events like the Great Depression, the coming of the welfare state, and even the achievement of Dominion autonomy within the British Empire reduced to interwar filler” (McKay and Swift 15). It is undeniable that there is a clear contrast between the social history of A Look at Canada and the national history of the Conservative guide.3

Under the Conservative government, there have recently been reviews of how history is taught in Canadian high schools, with the Conservatives’ stated hope that history instruction can be further improved and “taught properly” (Taube 2013). Some have argued that there is a clear and narrow agenda behind this rebranding campaign, and there is evidence to support the notion that the Conservatives’ glorification of Canada’s military past is the government’s primary purpose.

3 Unlike social history, national history emphasizes the study of political and military history as opposed to the history of ordinary people.
However, regardless of intent, there is undoubtedly an imbalance between the militaristic national history that is portrayed in Discover Canada and the emphasis on Canada as a historically peaceful nation in A Look at Canada. McKay and Swift argue that the current guide “adheres to scripts of high school texts from the 1920s and 1930s,” (18) which further supports the idea that the Conservative government is quickly shifting to a more traditional portrayal of the nation, evoking a time when Canada had closer ties with the British Empire. By omitting key aspects of social history, the study guide is depriving potential citizens of a deeper knowledge of their new country. Though Canada’s military history is an important part of the nation’s past, it is not the only feature that defines Canada. A focus on national history presents an inaccurate portrayal of Canada as a country that was built solely through military and political events while neglecting the social narratives of ordinary people. Nevertheless, both study guides agree there are additional elements that are important to presenting a Canadian narrative, specifically certain symbols that are representative of the country. It is the way these symbols are interpreted, however, that demonstrates the obvious differences.

Disparities in Symbolism

Both A Look at Canada and Discover Canada describe certain symbols as being expressive of national identity, which help explain what it means to be Canadian. For example, each edition names the maple leaf and the Parliament Buildings as significant symbols, but their consideration as such differs. Of the major symbols listed in A Look at Canada, the first to be named is Confederation, with Canada Day being mentioned shortly thereafter. These are both symbols that promote national unity and pride.
The Constitution is described as a significant symbol of Canadian nationhood; its purpose in providing a separation from the British is emphasized when the guide notes that until the 1982 Constitution Act all changes to this country’s Constitution had to be approved by the British Parliament. A Look at Canada states that the 1982 Act “gave the Parliament of Canada the power to change our Constitution.” The Act also allowed the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to become part of the Constitution, an event that was considered a major victory for the Liberal party under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau (13). The Liberal’s guide emphasizes that all the previous symbols promote Canadian unity, while simultaneously stressing the distinction from Britain. There is no mention of armed conflict as a defining feature of the nation, and the monarchy does not play a key role in Canadian symbolism as it does in Discover Canada.

The first symbol listed in Discover Canada is the Canadian Crown – a symbol of the state in Canada for 400 years. Though A Look at Canada refers to the Queen as a national symbol, Discover Canada goes into much greater detail about the role of the Crown. By stating the significance of monarchical ties early on, the guide stresses the alleged bond that Canada still shares with the British monarchy, ties that are consistently promoted in the Conservatives’ new national rebranding campaign. Discover Canada refers to the adoption of the Canadian Coat of Arms and Motto as “an expression of national pride after the First World War,” (38) noting that the Coat of Arms incorporates symbols from England, France, Scotland and Ireland. Describing Canada’s Coat of Arms in its guide once again entrenches the Conservatives’ emphasis on British contributions to Canadian history and culture, excluding other contributions, such as those of Canada’s First Nations. The Coat of Arms passage suggests that the governing party is promoting this symbol of Canada as something significant that gained importance after a military conflict.
Finally, *Discover Canada* acknowledges popular sports as a national symbol. Hockey is described by academic Jason Blake as a symbol of Canadian nationhood, as well as a tool for socialization and unification, both for Canadian youth as well as newcomers to the country (33). Furthermore, the community rink is considered to be a “vital social centre” and “the real backbone of countless communities across Canada” (Jones and Perry 52). Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s affection for the game of hockey is well-known, and this ongoing representation of him as a hockey fan is a key part of his government’s current Canadian rebranding strategy, especially as it allows for the personalization of a major political figure. Linking the Prime Minister to hockey confirms to Canadians that hockey is a sport of “national significance, thereby linking the politician with a dominant interpretation associated with hockey that continues to emphasize patriotism, masculinity and normality” (Scherer and McDermott 108-109). The fast-paced and aggressive nature of hockey could easily be argued to mirror combat, making hockey seem almost a warrior-like activity; therefore, its promotion fits nicely with the “warrior nation” mentality that *Discover Canada* seeks to reinforce.

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Based on the underlying themes of both official citizenship study guides over the past two decades, what can be determined? Realistically, neither edition could really be considered “complete,” as each embellishes different Canadian mythologies. The Liberal’s *A Look at Canada* portrays a forever-peaceful nation, with little mention of armed conflict or racial tensions in Canadian history.
On the other hand, while acknowledging that Canada does have a history of racism (before quickly changing the subject), Discover Canada promotes a masculine branding of the nation with a romanticized and glorified military history. With regards to the current rebranding of Canada as a warrior nation, Lynne Marks argues that there is a definite need for more balance between the social and national history that is being taught (2013). The military history of Canada is undeniably important, but more domesticated elements of social history should not be neglected as the history of the country is comprised of both national and social historical narratives.

Neither Discover Canada nor A Look at Canada present a perfect representation of the country, but they each have elements that are both beneficial and detrimental when it comes to representing Canada and helping newcomers learn about the country. There has undoubtedly been a shift away from Canada as a “peaceable kingdom” under the Liberal Party and towards the “warrior nation” of the current Conservative government. Though embellished, these narratives include truths about this country that should be common knowledge. National portrayals will always be subject to change, and to the political, social, cultural and historic perspectives of their writers, but a citizenship guide should not become primarily a vehicle for a national rebranding campaign by the current political party in power. Instead, it should allow for a nation to be represented both nationally and internationally in a balanced way, for the benefit not just of its newest citizens, but for the benefit of all citizens, past and present, who have contributed to what the country is today.
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