

Expo 67 – An Image of Unity, An Image of Diversity

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Expo 67 is commonly regarded as a turning point for Canada, having created an unprecedented sense of nationalism.¹ However, this nationalism was not reflective of the Canadian reality of the 1960s. This period saw the country's two most prominent minorities begin to voice their concerns; the *Hawthorn Report*, issued in 1966, put on display the inequitable conditions Status Indians faced, while the FLQ spoke for Québec's discontent within the federal system.² The image of a unified Canada that the creators wished Expo 67 to convey did not reflect a unity that already existed within Canada, but instead communicated a response to the threat these minorities posed to Canadian nationalism. Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson introduced the desired image of Expo at the opening of the fair as "unity of human purpose within the diversity of our linguistic cultural and social backgrounds."³ The organizers of Expo 67 attempted to appease the First Nations and Québécois people by putting them on display, but they did so with the ultimate goal of assimilating them into the portrayal of Canadian unity. This paper will identify the ways in which the elusive image of a unified Canada was presented throughout the fair, and will consider the image's success through the reaction of Canadian and international media. In order to establish the flaws that betrayed this image, the paper will also focus on the First Nations and French Canadian cultures and how they were represented at the fair. Despite the image of nationalism that emerged from this successful World's Fair, Expo 67 also reflected what will be argued was the divided Canada that truly existed in 1967.

¹ Pierre Berton, *1967: The Last Good Year* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1997).

² Eric Bédard, "The Intellectual Origins of the October Crisis" (UBC Press, 2007): 45-60

³ Lester B. Pearson, *Notes for the Prime Minister's remarks at the opening of Expo 67 in Montreal* (Ottawa: Office of the Prime Minister, 1967), 2.

The image the organizers of Expo 67 wished to portray through their fair was one of a country unified because of, or in spite of, its broad diversity. This portrayal was a departure from the one it had adopted at previous World's Fairs, where Canada's narrative was one of a British colonial power, itself a paternalistic figure to its own colonies: the First Nations people and French Canada.⁴ Perhaps in bringing the world to its home, Canada feared the present resentment the First Nations and French Canadian people were beginning to vocalise would surface. In the opinion of historian Sonja Macdonald, with the fair in its country, "the Canadian government could no longer fully control the images of Canadian identity."⁵ In order to subdue this potential threat, Canada molded its image as one that understood and embraced its cultural diversity. This meant "design[ing] and support[ing] the myth of Canada as a bicultural and bilingual nation,"⁶ with signs reading "Centre bilingual centre" and "Visit/Visitez Expo."⁷ It is evident through the terms 'bilingual' and 'bicultural' – both fundamental in popular discourse of the time partially due to the recently reported Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism⁸ – that Canada considered itself diverse in only two cultures: English and French. From the point of view of Expo 67 chairman John Wiggins Fisher, "one of our prime jobs will be to promote Canadian unity,"⁹ and the creators planned to do so through Expo 67's theme, "Man and His World". The theme was manufactured at the Montebello Conference in 1963, and was spread to many of the Fair's pavilions through similar vocabulary: "Man The Explorer, Man The Creator, Man The Producer, Man In The Community."¹⁰ The unity of theme was also conveyed through

⁴ Sonja Macdonald, "Expo 67, Canada's National Heterotopia: A Study of the Transformative Role of International Exhibitions in Modern Society," (Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 2003), 102-5.

⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁶ Eva-Marie Kröller, "Expo 67: Canada's Camelot?," *Remembering the Sixties*, special issue of *Canadian Literature* (1997), 36-51.

⁷ *Parti-pris*, "Colonialisme quotidien: centre bilingual centre," May-August 1967, 195, quoted in Kröller, "Expo 67: Canada's Camelot?," 39.

⁸ Berton, *1967: The Last Good Year*, 344.

⁹ John Wiggins Fisher is quoted in Berton, *1967: The Last Good Year*, 23.

¹⁰ Robert Fulford, *Remember Expo: A Pictorial Record* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1968), 12

design. Symbols, such as the Expo 67 logo, branded the fair with a unique look, and the message of visual harmony was emphasized through a “strict control of signage” to the extent that it was “almost puritanical.”¹¹ The Canadian government’s wish for a unifying theme song was granted with the infamous tune *Ca-na-da*, what historian Pierre Berton calls an “all-time smash record-breaker.”¹² An important example of symbolic patriotism also came with the adoption of a new anthem and flag leading up to Canada’s Centennial year. This re-creation of the Canadian identity was intended to illustrate Canada’s break from colonialism. Whether this portrayal of unity and nationalism was successful in the eyes of Canadians can be analysed through Canadian news articles of the time.

The Canadian media saw Expo 67 as incredibly successful, but they celebrated Canada’s new image while maintaining an awareness of its fabrication. Headlines such as “In Praise of the World Festival.”¹³ “Expo Triumph,”¹⁴ and “In Expo Canada Came of Age”¹⁵ demonstrate the perceived success of the fair by the media. Newspaper articles, such as one featured in *The Calgary Herald*, saw Expo 67 as bringing the country together, providing “Canadians with the unusual experience of having something in common to boast about.”¹⁶ The same article even deemed Expo a “national experience,”¹⁷ conforming to the desired image of the world fair. This feeling of nationalism, as one journalist in *The Winnipeg Free Press* observed, was partly due to the unprecedented travel of many Canadians across their geographically vast country.¹⁸ Some Canadian journalists had also accepted the depiction of unity in diversity, with headlines reading “French-English Expo Effort an Example for Canadians”¹⁹ and “Indians Migrating to Expo.”²⁰ Despite a certain acceptance of Canada’s

¹¹ Berton, 1967: *The Last Good Year*, 276.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³ F. S. Maner, “In Praise of the World Festival,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 27, 1967.

¹⁴ *The Calgary Herald*, “Expo Triumph,” October 28, 1967.

¹⁵ *The Globe and Mail*, “In Expo Canada Came of Age,” October 28, 1967.

¹⁶ *The Calgary Herald*, “Expo Triumph,” October 28, 1967.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *The Winnipeg Free Press*, “Expo runs out of time,” October 28, 1967.

¹⁹ *The Ottawa Journal*, “French-English Expo Effort an Example for Canadians,” May 2, 1967.

new image, journalists were also aware of the tools that were being used to create these feelings of unity; Gerard McNeil of *The Canadian Press* observed that “in a country where nationalism was always regarded as a foreign disorder, a song called *Ca-na-da* is suddenly the all-time best-seller.”²¹ McNeil notes the artificiality of nationalism coming from a country not used to celebrating its own identity, and he goes on to accuse Canadian “officialdom” of having spent millions of dollars generating the Expo 67 image.²² Another reporter in *The Ottawa Journal* referred to “Expo’s telling of the Canadian story,”²³ interpreting Canada’s new identity as no more than a storyline. A Québécois separatist journal, *Parti-pris*, condemned Expo 67’s attempt at diversity with what their journalist called a “game” of apparent bilingualism; “celle de jouer au Français.”²⁴ The Canadian media was overwhelmingly positive toward Expo 67, and seems to have accepted and reflected its message on a general level. However, the instances of acknowledgement of the fabrication of Canada’s narrative indicate that there was a gap, between the image Canada wished to present and the true political, economic, and social situation of 1960s Canada.

The international media appeared to accept Canada’s new image at face value, viewing the fair as a sign that Canada was discovering its identity. The *Economist*, a publication based out of England, saw Expo 67 as having “done more for Canadians’ self-confidence than any other recent event,”²⁵ and the London *Observer* wrote that Expo “has a glitter, sex appeal, and (has) given impact and meaning to a word that had neither: Canadian.”²⁶ Both English observations highlight Canada’s new identity, and say just as much about their perception of Canada’s old identity as they do about the new. *Time*

²⁰ Rosemary Speirs, “Indians Migrating to Expo Pavilion,” *The Canadian Press*, August 9, 1967.

²¹ Gerard McNeil, “Canadian’s Centennial enthusiasm flabbergasts pessimistic officials,” *The Canadian Press*, June 30, 1967.

²² Ibid.

²³ *The Ottawa Journal*, “Expo is Exciting,” April 28, 1967.

²⁴ *Parti-pris*, “Colonialisme quotidien: centre bilingue,” May-August 1967, 195, quoted in Kröller, “Expo 67: Canada’s Camelot?,” 48.

²⁵ *The Economist of London*, quoted in Fulford, *Remember Expo*, 26.

²⁶ *The London Observer*, quoted in Fulford, *Remember Expo*, 25.

Magazine saw Expo 67 as “the most successful world’s fair in history”²⁷ and *The New York Times* deemed it to have achieved a “sophisticated standard of excellence.”²⁸ Both American opinions suggest that Canada had succeeded not only in promoting itself as a rising nation, but also in its ability to create substance of international quality. According to the response of the international media, Canada had changed from previous appearances on the world stage, which suggests a certain level of success in Expo’s representation of the country.

Where Expo 67 strayed from its portrayal of unity, and revealed itself for what it really was in 1967, was in its representation of the First Nations and the French Québécois population. Though Expo 67’s intended theme was unity in diversity, a quick glance at the Canadian context of the 1960s allows one to observe a political, economic and social lack of unity between Canada proper and its largest minorities. It was not until 1960 that Status Indians received the right to vote federally.²⁹ The *Hawthorn Report* of 1966-7 advised against what was a proposed assimilation and removal of Indian status,³⁰ and revealed the economically destitute of the First Nations people.³¹ As for their representation in the fair itself, the First Nations people were given their own pavilion, but its placement in the far margins of the exposition’s layout³² can be seen as one of the basic design flaws that betrayed Canada’s intended message of unity. Myra Rutherdale and Jim Miller acknowledge that this placement may have been unintentional, but that “the site symbolized the place for First Nations in 1960s Canada: of but not in the country.”³³ What added to the discrepancy with

²⁷ *Time Magazine*, quoted in Fulford, *Remember Expo*, 25.

²⁸ *The New York Times*, quoted in Berton, *1967: The Last Good Year*, 274.

²⁹ Alan C. Cairns, *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

³¹ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, “A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies Part 1 (The Hawthorn Report, October 1966),” http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071120104036/http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/srvy/sci_e.html.

³² Myra Rutherdale and Jim Miller, “It’s Our Country’: First Nations Participation in the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67,” *Online Journal of the CHA* 17, no. 2 (2006): 158.

³³ Myra Rutherdale and Jim Miller, “It’s Our Country’: First Nations Participation in the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67,” *Online Journal of the CHA* 17, no. 2 (2006): 158.

the Expo creators' intended message was that the First Nations were largely in control of the artwork and text of their pavilion, allowing their voice to compete with the rest of Expo 67's.³⁴ The message the First Nations conveyed through their pavilion was predominantly negative toward the Canadian government, but honest and subtle in its delivery.³⁵ The message detailed the mistreatment of First Nations by the white settlers, the First Nations' subjection to colonial warfare, and their assimilation into an educational system that deprived them of their culture.³⁶ However, because of Indian Affairs' involvement in the pavilion, this message was placed side-by-side with the classic message of successful assimilation. One cannot determine the extent to which the First Nations' somewhat shocking message overtook the image of unity Canada wished to present, but one can assume that with three million visitors to the Indian Pavillion, the discrepancy did not go unnoticed.

A similar threat to Expo 67's intended image was the relationship between English and French Canada. The struggle of the Québécois people, who were beginning to become aware of their perceived colonized relationship with Canada, were finding their voice in the radical FLQ separatist movement, which demanded a political, economic, and cultural break from the rest of Canada.³⁷ Their discontent could not be stifled by Expo 67. J. M. Bumsted saw "the principal legacy of Expo 67" as the one it was trying so hard to avoid – "an increase in the perceived gulf between French Canada and the remainder of the nation."³⁸ In an unprecedented event, French President Charles de Gaulle visited Expo 67 and proclaimed his support for the separation of Quebec with his proclamation speech, "Vive le Québec Libre!"³⁹ In an attempt to prevent the country from mass hysteria, Prime Minister Pearson reacted with the following: "(De Gaulle's) statements tended to encourage a small minority of our

³⁴ Ibid., 159.

³⁵ Ibid., 161.

³⁶ Ibid., 160-61.

³⁷ Bédard, "The Intellectual Origins of the October Crisis," 45-60

³⁸ J. M. Bumsted, "The Birthday Party," (*The Beaver* 76, no. 2 1996,) 12.

³⁹ Charles de Gaulle's speech is quoted in Berton, 1967, 306.

population whose aim is to destroy Canada.”⁴⁰ Pearson’s choice of words portrays Quebec separatists as individuals attempting to destroy Canada not just politically, but also by attacking its image of unity. In light of De Gaulle’s remarks, French Canadians continued to threaten this image at Expo 67, with Michèle Lalonde reading her controversial poem “Speak White” alongside the poem “Terre des hommes,” the latter which she had been commissioned to write by the organizers of Expo.⁴¹ French Canadians also refused to appear at several other Federal initiatives throughout the Centennial year, including the lighting of the Centennial flame.⁴² In doing so, Québec attempted a deliberate removal from the desired image of a unified Canada. Both the First Nations and the French Canadian people had much to say about their political, economic, and social status during the 1960s, and they were able to find their voice at Expo 67, despite a message that attempted to assimilate them into Canadian culture.

The First Nations, Québécois and Canadian message lay primarily in each culture’s pavilion, or more specifically, the perspective each pavilion’s timeline told of Canada’s history.⁴³ The Canadian Government pavilion’s timeline began with the arrival of European settlers and continued to the 1960s, where “those nation-building activities which occurred following Confederation”⁴⁴ were represented. Again, the message Canada wished to convey was one of strong unity that emerged from a hard struggle against diversity, and from which nationalism was now common practice. The timeline did not leave out the First Nations and French Canadian people, but it told the story of Canada from the British settlers’ point of view. From this perspective, Canadian history began with the arrival of the European settlers. This history neglects the presence of the First Nations people on the continent in the years prior.⁴⁵ Conversely, the timeline the First Nations’ pavilion endorsed saw the First Nations’

⁴⁰ Lester B. Pearson, *Words and occasions: an anthology of speeches and articles selected from his papers* (Harvard University Press, 1970), 277.

⁴¹ Kröller, “Expo 67: Canada’s Camelot?,” 48.

⁴² Bumsted, “The Birthday Party,” 4.

⁴³ Macdonald “Expo 67, Canada’s National Heterotopia,” 6-7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

culture as existing long before the European settlers arrived. Their timeline illustrated how European settlers interrupted the First Nations' way of life, putting emphasis on the fact that there was a spiritual aspect to First Nations culture long before the arrival of the missionaries.⁴⁶ The Québec pavilion also told the Canadian story differently, viewing Confederation as a recent development.⁴⁷ The Québec pavilion's timeline used the images of the *coureur de bois* and the French explorers⁴⁸ to remind visitors that the Québécois people had a distinct culture before Canada became united in Confederation. In doing so, argues Macdonald, the Québec pavilion managed to "expose the youth of the Canadian nation,"⁴⁹ and therefore alter the timeline the Canadian Government pavilion had presented. The competing timelines show the different perspectives each group had toward their country and its culture, and the fact that visitors were able to view all three may have had a disruptive effect on the image of a unified Canada.

The presence of the First Nations and French Canadian people at Expo threatened the unified Canadian image in a similar way to how these two minority cultures were threatening Canadian nationalism at the time. These threats may have actually served as a catalyst for this image,⁵⁰ for it is surely not without a certain self-consciousness of the internal problems it was facing that Canada chose to transform its image into one that presented the opposite of what it was experiencing at the time. In saying this, it must be acknowledged that Canada created an overwhelmingly successful fair, and in turn, an overwhelmingly successful image. However, Expo 67 and all it hoped to be did provide a fairly clear reflection of Canada in 1967, particularly because of the extremes to which the creators went to promote their notion of "unity...within diversity."⁵¹ These two words, unity and diversity, which Pearson hoped would coexist in Expo 67's image, allow for a revealing commentary on the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 140.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Lester B. Pearson, *Notes for the Prime Minister's remarks at the opening of Expo 67 in Montreal* (Ottawa: Office of the Prime Minister, 1967), 2.

period. Unity and diversity existed as themes in 1967 Canada, but were not, as the intended image claimed them to be, peacefully coexistent.