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Examining the Struggle for a More Inclusive Identity and The Early Advocacy of Multiculturalism

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the struggle for equal recognition within Canadian identity by non-charter groups. These groups, by rejecting the idea of Canada as solely bilingual and bicultural, successfully challenged government efforts to replace Anglo-conformity with a bicultural model. As a compromise, Canada adopted the notion of "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework." This approach helped promote a more inclusive national identity and contributed to the creation of a peaceful, tolerant, and unified society. For many ethnic communities, particularly visible minorities, it marked progress in removing barriers to full integration. The inclusive environment also supported advances in LGBTQ and Indigenous rights, including acknowledgment of the historical injustices faced by First Nations peoples. As a result, Canada has adopted an innovative approach to inclusivity by creating a new national identity that embraces both diversity and bilingualism.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Canada, Immigrant, Diversity, Ethnic, Biculturalism

Introduction

The push from diversity advocates who championed multiculturalism in Canada resulted in the implementation of the nation's cultural diversity policy. To determine whether it was successful or not, we need to ask: To what extent has the country lived up to the expectations of its multiculturalism advocates? Unreasonably high expectations for a policy necessitate a review of its initial goals and a fair assessment of its current achievements. Without a doubt, multiculturalism is at a crossroads due to criticism from both the left and the right. It is appropriate that we review the standards set by its proponents in the 1960s and use them as a benchmark for our conclusions.

Due to the efforts of activists in the 1960s advocating for the acknowledgment of all cultures in Canada, the country is now seen as a global leader in multiculturalism, with diversity deeply embedded in its national identity. Since the 1970s, Canadian multiculturalism has provided a supportive framework for integrating new immigrants into society while respecting and celebrating their cultural backgrounds. For new immigrants, multiculturalism in Canada has served as a welcoming and empowering force, promoting equal opportunities, cultural expression, and community participation.

Both immigration and emigration cause considerable stress to people. On the one hand, emigration causes tension and anxiety for people since it is emotionally distressing for humans to have to leave their place of origin. On the other hand, because of integration challenges and pressure to abandon their cultural life, new immigrants experience severe psychological strain in their new country of adoption. Twenty percent of Asian immigrants in the United States expressed tension connected to legal matters, while forty-five reported stressed from encounters with racism, according to a US study (Alegria et al., 2017).

Further, the United States' idea of 'melting pot' suggests that immigrants assimilate into the dominant American culture. Even though Canada has legal issues and racism, immigrants are relieved that the state does not require them to give up their cultural life in order to fully integrate into the Canadian mosaic. For new immigrants attempting to make a life for themselves in a foreign country, Canadian multiculturalism policy provides consolation.

Literature Review

Advocates of multiculturalism in Canada are ardent supporters of the policy for good reason- they claim that it fosters equality, tolerance, and respect. The opponents claim that multiculturalism is divisive because it promotes division and isolation, which impede integration. Critics view this as an illusion that is 'superficial and exhibitionistic' in nature that only promotes a 'dash of color and the flash' of the dance, nothing substantial (Golfman, 1996). Academics research, however, examine its successes, setbacks, and difficulties. Whether you like it or not, multiculturalism has been ingrained in Canadian society since the policy was announced in October 1971. However, Will Kymlicka observed that multiculturalism is "neither popular nor well understood" among everyday Canadians 2008. A Study highlights its novel and beneficial role in replacing the outdated and unpopular idea of assimilation, which was unable to yield the intended outcomes.

Multiculturalism, it states, "has helped to change the terms of integration for immigrant communities," it created "space for minorities to maintain and celebrate aspects of their culture and traditions while participating in the mainstream of Canadian life" (Banting, 2022). Haroon Siddiqui believes that newcomers do not wish to conform with the old ideas of how they should and should not live in Canada. The freedom to complete the process of integration without sacrificing their own culture helps them in settling in new society. The new Canada offers them recognition as "who they are". A library of parliament study argues that multiculturalism at all levels of governance is more about "the management of diversity" (Brosseau & Dewing, 2018). Thus, it is a tool for governments of all levels, from municipal to provincial and federal, to govern a multi-ethnic society.

However, not all political parties of Canada support this approach with the same fervor. A study notes that the left and right's ideologically motivated parties have varying views on multiculturalism. While the center-left is clearly in favor of this policy, the right has shown open hostility. Needless to say, one does not detect a cross-party consent on multicultural policy between the Liberals and the Conservatives (Westlake et al., 2025). Right-wing opponents, like the Reform party, have been misrepresenting how it affects the lives and integration of non-English and non-French immigrants. However, studies by left-wing ideologues are also harshly critical of multiculturalism because it has failed to stem the tide of racism in Canada. A collection of critical articles claim that systemic racism created by various government policies receives unconscious support from multicultural policy.

Richard Day argues that Canada has not become a society of equality and peaceful co-existence. In fact, no amount or style of "state intervention can ever bring an end to tensions related to ethnocultural relations of power". Indigenous Canadians were ignored in Canada's debates on assimilation versus multiculturalism until the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established by the government. The Commission urged Canadians to confront the reality of establishment and operation of residential schools, which can best be described as 'cultural genocide' (Government of Canada, 2015). As noted above, the radical right purposefully misunderstands multiculturalism in order to fight it. Maxime Bernier, the leader of the People's Party of Canada, wrote that "having people live among us who reject basic Western values such as freedom, equality, tolerance and openness doesn't make us strong.

People who refuse to integrate into our society and want to live apart in their ghetto don't make our society strong". Even defenders of cultural diversity like Kymlicka have started questioning the relevance of multiculturalism in Canada. He argued that we may need to move to a "post-multicultural" approach and give multiculturalism "a dignified burial". While we can understand the pipe-dreams of diversity advocates like Kymlicka because they had anticipated utopia from multiculturalism as a policy, people like Bernier intentionally misrepresent the customs and values of new immigrants. Among recent immigrants, where has he found people who oppose freedom, equality, tolerance, and openness?

Results and Discussion

We cannot assess a policy by deliberately misrepresenting its goals or by holding it to irrational standards. To find out what the proponents of this policy wanted and what have we accomplished in more than 50 years of multiculturalism, we need to examine the underlying root causes of the multicultural movement. Thus, the study needs to concentrate on the demands of the "third force"- that is non-English, non-French, and non-Indigenous Canadians- and examine how well multiculturalism has worked for these non-charter Canadians? A 1965 study described Canada as a Vertical Mosaic, where society was dominated by an elite "British Charter Group" which was overrepresented at the top levels of occupational and reward structures of Canadian society because opportunities for education and social mobility were limited only to WASP- White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Porter, 1965). Since the announcement of the multiculturalism policy in October 1971, the society and its elite have undoubtedly become more inclusive. A comparative analysis of our past, present and future prospects demonstrates how Canada is marching on the high road of civilization to create a more respectful and tolerant society.

Even though Canada did not formally embrace biculturalism, the third force reacted to its mention by Quebec nationalists and Lester Pearson's new Liberal government in the early 1960s. The Canadian state had unofficially pursued a policy of uniculturalism by imposing British cultural values on other Canadians. Under the policy of Anglo-conformity, cultural diversity "was rejected as incompatible with the concept of nation-building and national identity" (Fleras, 1989). Recognizing the growing momentum of Quebec nationalism, Prime Minister Pearson took a conciliatory stance by accepting *Le Devoir* editor André Laurendeau's proposal to create a royal commission to examine the cultural and linguistic differences between Anglophones and Francophones. Consequently, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B&B Commission) was created in 1963, with Andre Laurendeau and Davidson Dunton serving as co-chairs "to inquire into and report upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian confederation on the basis of an equal partnership of the two founding races" (Gibbins, 1990).

The third force objected to the emphasis on 'two cultures' and 'two founding races,' viewing it as a way of sidelining Canada's other ethnic communities. In the briefs and presentations of the other Canadians (the third force) to the B&B Commission, notes Laurendeau, the impression was given that the Commission was actually creating a problem (Laurendeau, 1991). The B&B Commission based its work on submissions and presentations from both individuals and organizations. Various minority ethnic associations contributed with briefs and research reports. Among these was an anthropological study examining the social and economic life of Italians in Montreal and Edmonton. Another report examined how the Jewish community in Montreal viewed French Canadian nationalism and separatism? Additionally, a study on voluntary organizations detailed the membership, structure, and activities of various ethnic

groups in Canada including Germans, Dutch, Chinese, Hungarians, Poles, Scandinavians, Black Canadians, and Jewish Canadians.

This study also highlighted their immigration histories and their social and cultural goals in Canada. (Laurendeau, 1991). The controversy surrounding the B&B Commission sparked members of the third force to push for greater equality in Canada's social, political, cultural, and symbolic spheres. The government created the commission under the assumption that Canada was mainly composed of British and French elements. However, this viewpoint faced strong resistance from the third force, especially in Western Canada. They pointed out to the government that "the version of Canada the B&B Commission was meant to examine no longer exists" (Kruhlak, 1991). Both the third force and French-Canadians had legitimate grievances regarding the English elite's hegemony in Canada. But conflicts also started to arise between these two groups. The belief that only the French and British should hold a prominent position in the Canadian confederation served as the foundation for French Canadians' drive for biculturalism.

They contended that other people should not expect to be regarded on a same footing with the Quebecois because they did not come to Canada to establish colonies, provinces, or political institutions (Arnold, 1970). In a courteous response, Conservative Senator Paul Yuzyk, *de facto* leader of the Third Force, gently reminded French Canadians that "the Ukrainians have brought under cultivation approximately 10 million acres of land on the prairies which is twice as much as French Canadians, who cultivated in Quebec in over three centuries some five million acres" (Yuzyk, 1968). It goes without saying that he contended Canada's reality was not bicultural but rather multicultural. The creation of the B&B Commission indicated that the English elite was prepared to address the concerns of French-Canadians, but was unwilling to extend the same consideration to other Canadian groups. The new historical context presented the federal government with two distinct options. The growing wave of French nationalism made it increasingly hard to overlook the demands of French Canadians, particularly in light of the findings and recommendations of the B&B Commission. In this report, the government faced the option of officially endorsing the "two founding races" theory by embracing bilingualism and biculturalism.

However, the increasing numbers and rising activism of the third force brought the idea of multiculturalism to the forefront of the national agenda. The government now faced a decision between recognizing the special status sought by French Canadians or upholding the third force's demand for equal treatment of all Canadians. Incorporating all cultures into Canada's symbolic framework was a significant challenge. Sociologist Reginald Bibby questioned: "is it possible to have any collective symbols that do not offend the cultural inclination of some? Is it possible to have consensus on anything at a national level?" (Bibby, 1990). Without a doubt, the answer was yes: the Canadian flag opted for a unifying symbol the maple leaf instead of combining the Union Jack and the fleur-de-lis. There is no question that the aims and objectives of the third force were distinct from those of French Canadians. While the third force focused on attaining symbolic equality and acknowledging the role all Canadians played in the nation's development, French-Canadians, beyond advocating for biculturalism, were also concerned with issues like the monarchy and the predominance of the English language.

The 1965 interim report of the B&B Commission stated that Canada was undergoing the most significant crisis in its history, largely without realizing it. In its 1967 main report, the Commission proposed several measures to address the crisis. Notably, it called for the full recognition of both French and English as official languages of Canada at the federal level, as well as within the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick (McNaught, 1976). In 1966, Prime Minister Lester Pearson initiated the bilingualism process within the federal

government. However, despite the B&B Commission's recommendation, the Official Languages Act was not passed by the Canadian government until 1969, during the tenure of Pierre Trudeau as prime minister. It marked the culmination of the bilingualism process that had its legal beginnings with the British North America Act (BNA) of 1867. Section 133 of the BNA allowed for the use of both English and French in federal courts and Parliament, as well as in the courts and legislature of Quebec. Long before he was appointed prime minister, Trudeau supported bilingualism, believing it to be the natural next step in the reforms started during the Pearson administration. He was aware that, as long as bilingualism was separated from the concept of biculturalism, minority ethnic groups were prepared to make a specific concession to French Canadians.

Most of English Canada welcomed the Official Languages Act as a necessary and appropriate response to the quiet Revolution and to the growing independence movement in Quebec. However, bilingualism faced opposition in Western Canada, especially from the third force. (Laxer & Robert, 1977). Multiculturalism was the primary goal of the third force; however, advocates such as Senator Paul Yuzyk were also supportive of bilingualism. Although, the third force also included supporters of multilingualism (Purewal, 1992). The government found it hard to recognize several of Canada's languages. Government services would have been in disarray if there had been dozens of different official languages. The minority language groups understood that their demand was unrealistic. In order to get the intended result the formal acceptance of multiculturalism they utilized it as a negotiating chip. Senator Yuzyk and others understood that Trudeau's fight against French Canadian separatism included taking steps to address some of the legitimate concerns of Francophones.

The federal government had to demonstrate to French Canadians that Quebec government was not the only voice for the French in Canada, that Ottawa was as concerned about their issues, and that it was prepared to offer solutions. The Third Force recognized that merely praising the B&B Commission's conclusions and suggestions would have validated the government's approach of recognizing Canada's dual nature based on the idea of two "founding races". Trudeau tried to reassure them that the government had no such intentions. He argued that Ottawa treated French as equal to English not because French Canadians were one of the two so-called founding races of the confederation, but because they had the power to potentially divide the country. He stated that the concept of two founding races was "dangerous in theory and groundless in practice" (Trudeau, 1968). The third force received indications from these opinions that Trudeau was paying attention to their call for multiculturalism. In 1967, the mandate of the B&B Commission was broadened to encompass research into the cultural contributions of other Canadian ethnic groups.

The Trudeau administration also began supporting a number of conferences centered around diversity, such as the well-known "Thinkers Conference on Cultural Rights," which Senator Paul Yuzyk held in Toronto in 1968. Additionally, York University's "International Conference of Christians and Jews" benefited from government financing. French Canadian activists, noticing a growing anti-dualism movement in Canada, began assuring the third force that the dualism they supported would be limited to the state level, while society as a whole would continue to be pluralistic. They also contended that promoting biculturalism did not conflict with supporting other groups in preserving their own cultural identities. "Canada is principally and primarily a bilingual and bicultural society," wrote Claude Ryan, "but it is also a multicultural society." Further, he argued that personal freedom, safeguarded by the state, could be willingly used to support multiculturalism (Ryan, 1985).

The underlying message communicated to the third force was that only English Canadians were entitled to official equality with the French. They made the following claims: first, that French

and English people were far more numerous than any other single group; second, that French-English dualism was deeply ingrained in Canadian history; third, that only French and English people could claim to have formed a complete society on their own; and fourth, that each of them had the potential to destroy this nation. The country advanced toward a future filled with uncertainty. Pierre Trudeau observed that “federalism is ultimately bound to fall if the nationalism it cultivates is unable to generate a national image which has immensely more appeal than the regional ones” (Trudeau, 1968).

In 1970, the B&B Commission's report on the "cultural contributions of the other ethnic groups" in book IV effectively acknowledged the third force's struggle for equality as a success. The Commission examined the part played by the other Canadians in the country’s history and the contributions they made to Canadian life (Government of Canada, 1970: 8). Alongside the regional public hearings and submitted briefs, the Commission examined various research papers and essays authored by its staff and affiliated scholars, as well as independent studies conducted by other academics. Book IV's primary goal was to investigate the ways in which other Canadians, either individually or in groups, have assimilated into Canadian society. In addition to taking into account the economic, political, and social roles of other Canadians, it provided a historical overview of the numerous immigration phases to Canada. The Commission expressed support for protecting the cultural heritage of Canada's diverse ethnic communities.

It stated that “in adopting its advantages and disadvantages, those whose origins is neither French nor English do not have to cast off or hide their own cultures” (Government of Canada, 1970: xxvi). The wording of the Commission's report marked the beginning of a new era. Denying the nation's multicultural identity was no longer acceptable. Action on the Commission’s report was shaped by the shifting political fortunes of the Trudeau government. Book IV of the B&B Commission sat idle for an entire year before the government acted on its recommendations. Trudeau experienced a surge in approval reaching 60% after his decisive response to the FLQ crisis in October 1970. However, by 1971, public confidence in him had declined significantly (Radwanski, 1978). For the Liberal party's reelection campaign, new strategies for garnering votes had to be developed. Multiculturalism was one strategy Trudeau could use to gain support, particularly from Western Canadians and various ethnic communities across the country. He might counter the arguments of French Canadians by comparing their situation to that of the third force. Trudeau could question how French Canadians could demand special privileges when one-third of the population, made up of ethnic minorities, was already being treated as second-class citizens.

Prime Minister Trudeau's invitation to address the Ukrainian-Canadian Congress in Winnipeg was a strategic opportunity. This group not only represented a significant portion of the prairie electorate but also played a leading role in advancing multiculturalism. To maximize support for the upcoming federal election, the government was eager not to miss any opportunity to secure votes. Consequently, it announced its plan to implement the recommendation outlined in Book IV of the B&B Commission. The idea of a multicultural policy was finalized on September 23, 1971 (Gwyn, 1974). Prime Minister Trudeau formally revealed the policy in the House of Commons on October 8, 1971 just two days before he was scheduled to address the Congress of the Ukrainian-Canadian Council. Trudeau's language policy, which included the Official Languages Act, was the main component of his plan to combat separatists and ultranationalists in Quebec (Radwanski, 1978). This symbolic order included the new policy as well: "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework." The aims and objectives of the policy, however, captured the essence of the third force demand for an inclusive Canadian identity.

A government official responsible for multicultural affairs conveyed the essence of the policy, stating that the goal of the new approach was “to get the people with the funny last names into the mainstream, on equal footing with the MacDonald’s and the Cartier’s” (Gwyn, 1974). In other words, the concept of biculturalism originally promoted by the B&B Commission's mandate was subsequently supplanted by multiculturalism. The new approach gave the impression that the government was shaping the direction of Canada’s cultural life. However, a larger problem with multicultural policy was that its management and interpretation were marked by a lack of continuity, clarity, and consistency (Stephan, 1982). No one in the PCO or PMO was ever officially appointed or specifically assigned the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of multiculturalism policy “with an eye to the policy and planning initiatives of other government departments or federal cultural agencies” (Lupul, 1982).

Although it had a slow start and was initially criticized for focusing too much on superficial displays like music and dance, multiculturalism gradually helped new immigrants see that they could integrate into Canadian society without abandoning their original culture. More importantly, it sent a message to all ethnic groups in Canada that, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, they were united under a shared Canadian identity. The Canadian government reacted when difficulties arose throughout the integration process. Due to immigration from non-European countries, the third force become more diversified by the 1980s. From the moment they arrived in Canada to their eventual integration into society, they experienced both overt and covert racism. Many representatives from national groups representing racial minorities discussed the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in Canada during the House of Commons Special Committee on the Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society hearings in 1983.

They underlined that in order to combat racism, the government must implement both institutional and legislative changes. The Committee emphasized the urgent need to change laws to guarantee visible minorities' inclusion in important public institutions in its report to the House of Commons (Government of Canada, 2022). As part of its efforts to address systemic discrimination, particularly against visible minorities and Indigenous Canadians, the government enacted the Employment Equity Act in 1986, along with other initiatives. While multiculturalism has not produced a flawless society or turned Canada into a utopia, it has helped foster a more welcoming environment for newcomers, reduced discrimination against visible minorities, and promoted greater acceptance of the country's cultural diversity. This cultural diversity has helped strengthen national unity and reduce regional divisions within Canada.

Following the defeat of the 1995 separatist referendum, former Premier Jacques Parizeau attributed the loss to "money and ethnic votes" (Bright et al., 1999). It suggested that other Canadians affiliated with non-charter ethnic groups backed a united Canada in its opposition to the secessionist movement. The presence of diverse groups across institutions has consistently grown throughout the post-multiculturalism era. April 2025 “elections would suggest Canada is increasingly integrating immigrants, visible minorities and others from diverse gender, social and religious backgrounds into the country’s political life” (Bird, 2005). In a relatively short span, the country has advanced from a model of Anglo-conformity to one that values all cultures, making the cultural mosaic more balanced and less hierarchical.

Conclusion

While Canada's liberal democracy is based on the principle that everyone is equal before and under the law, the constitution also recognizes collective rights, reflecting our commitment to multiculturalism and to preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of diverse groups. The Center-Right has been critical of the acknowledgment of these communal rights. They contend

that prioritizing group loyalty over Canadian loyalty is dividing people and disregarding their rights. These opponents fail to acknowledge that people pick up values, ideas, and attitudes from their ancestry. Immersion in Canadian values and ideas is another aspect of socialization that comes with living in Canadian society. Cultural diversity has produced a distinct set of ideals that support harmony, peace, and tolerance in Canada. The third force did not aim to create division when they resisted efforts to replace Anglo-conformity with biculturalism. Instead, they sought equal recognition within Canadian identity. Their advocacy contributed to the adoption of multiculturalism, which embraces the diverse cultures present in Canada and supports the formation of a shared symbolic identity. A supportive environment was created to tackle the challenges faced by minorities in integrating into society. The government responded to widespread structural and overt racism experienced by visible minorities and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Although some critics argue that multiculturalism may hinder governmental efforts to combat systemic racism, more research is needed to assess whether inclusive policies are actually obstructing the removal of integration barriers for all Canadians. The inclusive identity function of multiculturalism in addressing the long-standing problems of Indigenous Canadians, particularly the detrimental impact of residential schools, and the LGBTQ community's struggles also require further research. Simultaneously, we must consider how this inclusive atmosphere promotes the involvement of all ethnic groups in a variety of institutions, including governmental ones. The third force strongly advocated for the principles of equality and inclusion promoted by multiculturalism. In this regard, their struggle was a significant success.

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