

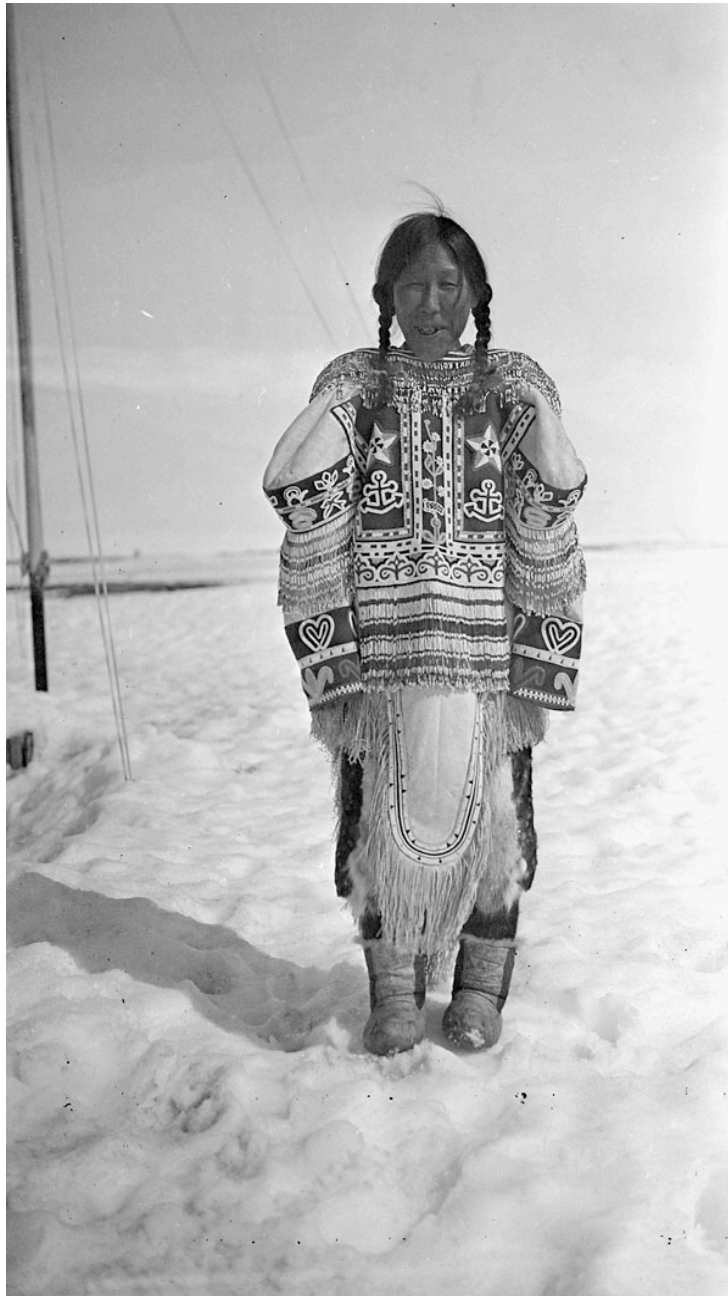
“SWEET SMILING PEOPLES OF THE FAR NORTH” : INUIT PEOPLE AND THE WESTERN GAZE¹

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Inuit representation in relation to the formation of Canadian identity is an idea worth considering when speaking of the 20th century in Canada. The white man’s involvement in the North, a concept I would like to regard as the Western gaze, took many forms over time. In fact, according to Keith Crowe, various Christian missionaries settled in the Canadian North with the aim of converting the Aboriginal peoples, as early as ca. 1811. As a result, with the later involvement of the federal government, the 20th century became a dark chapter in Inuit history with the establishment of the federal residential schools, intended to assimilate the younger Inuit generations.² On the economic front, the Hudson’s Bay Company’s long involvement in the North, as early as 1670, was notable yet the post-World War II era generated a new interest in the Canadian North with the development of new industries such as mining and defense.³ This era was also noteworthy in shifting domestic policy toward the North, with a particular promotion of the First Nations as part of the Canadian identity. With the Canadian-American Alaska Boundaries dispute, there came to be a growing territorial threat for Northern Canada, making the nationalization of Inuit into Canadian society a key element of national policy.

This virtual exhibition will explore Inuit representations, captured by a white man’s perspective – also known as the Western gaze – and presented with a particular emphasis

on the Inuit smile. The black and white photographic portraits in "Sweet Smiling Peoples of the Far North" have been captured by five different Canadian photographers; namely Donald Benjamin Marsh (1903-1973), Bud Glunz (n.d.), Richard Harrington (1911-2005), Gavin D. White (1927-), and Charles Gimpel (? -1973), all of whom spent time in the Canadian North between the the 1930s and 1960s. This exhibition is a tentative analysis of the smiles on the faces of Inuit men, women and children over a period of thirty years, as captured by these photographers. The presentation questions the representation of Inuit "sweet smiling faces" by photographers bent on ethnographic observation and complicit in the act of cultural assimilation. "Sweet Smiling Peoples of the North" explores the unmistakable, stereotypical, and at times hospitable but mostly mysterious Inuit smile.



Smiling Inuit Woman with decorated amauti, 1929-1933.

Donald Benjamin Marsh (1903-1973), Arviat, Nunavut.

Black and white photograph. Library and Archives Canada / c. 3614287.

<http://www.lac->

[bac.gc.ca/pam_archives/public_mikan/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayIt](http://www.lac-bac.gc.ca/pam_archives/public_mikan/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3614287&back_url=%28%29&&back_url=%28%29)

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Originally from England, Rev. Donald Benjamin Marsh (1903-1973) was the founder of the first Anglican Mission in Eskimo Point (Arviat), in 1929.⁴ He also practiced amateur photography and filmmaking on site. His photograph shows an Inuit woman whose traditional dress affirms her Indigenous nature, whereas the Christian cross and anchor symbols, sewn onto her garment, signify her conversion. Meanwhile, the contrast of her awkward pose and smile can be perceived as a form of social inferiority and the result of her conversion. In fact, until the 1930s, smiling at the camera was considered to “make the subject look foolish and childlike.”⁵ Consequently, despite the fact that the smile can be a nonverbal behavioral signifier of enthusiasm, the seemingly forced smile, and overall timid and stiff body language of this female subject expresses an overall discomfort in front of the camera.⁶ Given the visual particularities mentioned above, one ought to consider for whom this photograph was meant to be seen. Hence, this first representation of the Inuit smile consists of a woman seen from a missionary point of view whose portrayal is a visual record certifying Marsh’s success in converting her to Christianity, while visually attesting to the subject’s discomfort, torn between her Inuit traditions and the new Christian values.⁷



Inuit Man in White Parka, Smiling, January 1946.

Bud Glunz (n.d.), Pangnirtung, Nunavut. Black and white photograph.

Library and Archives Canada/ c. 3842275.

[collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=nnn&rec_nbr=000003842275&title=Inuit+man+in+white+parka%2C+smiling.+&ecopy=e010692539-v6&back_url=\(\)](https://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=nnn&rec_nbr=000003842275&title=Inuit+man+in+white+parka%2C+smiling.+&ecopy=e010692539-v6&back_url=())

Bud Glunz (n.d.) was a freelance photographer for the Still Photography Division of the National Film Board of Canada whose work became especially significant for the extensive documentation of the Canadian North (1945–January 1946).⁸ According to Library and Archives Canada, Glunz' series of photographs presents the Canadian Cultural agency's perspective toward a minority population managed by the Government of Canada and more so, depicts the contribution of Native trappers to the Canadian economy. The photograph was taken a year after the end of Second World War, at a time when mining industries and defence installations were beginning to change the social and economic face of the North.⁹ In this image, the Inuit man is represented as a friendly and harmless individual. In fact, an original caption was added in 1946, written by an anonymous government employee, and distributed to the Canadian press in conjunction with the original photograph that read:

Canadian Economy is enriched yearly by a wealth of furs - contribution of the little-known, poorly-mapped, sparsely-populated North. Out of the land of the Eskimos comes the bulk of the white fox catch, while a few blue, red and cross foxes, weasel (ermine) and polar bears are also traded. The Eskimo is a happy, childlike nomad. He lives mainly by fishing and hunting, his principal foods being seal, caribou, ptarmigan and white whale. This is a typical Eskimo of the Canadian Eastern Arctic.¹⁰

Thus, the seemingly primitive methods of subsistence by hunting are newly interpreted as beneficial to the burgeoning fur industry with this Inuit man now assuming the economic role of product provider. Still, this image functions as a tool to support the stereotypical image of the Inuit as a naive and immature people.¹¹ The photograph with its accompanying text operates as a nationalist effort to both accept the “primitive” as part of the Canadian identity and confirm the Inuit’s positive acceptance of this state of affairs.¹²



Two Inuit Men Smiling, January 1946.

Bud Glunz, (n.d.) Pangnirtung, Nunavut. Black and White Photograph

Library and Archives Canada. c 3842282. http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/results/images?module=images&action=results&Language=eng&form=images_simple&lang=eng&startRecord=201&sortBy=score+desc&digitalContentInd=1&query=inuit&mediaType=

This related photograph by Glunz, entitled Two Inuit Men Smiling (1946) captures two seemingly working men with faint smiles. Similarly to the series of images, it too is labeled as smiling and circulated with the same accompanying caption.¹³



Group of Young Inuit Women and Children Laughing and Smiling, 1949.

Richard Harrington (1911-2005) Coppermine.

Black and White photography. Library and Archives Canada. c. 3549401.

http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3549401&rec_nbr_list=140370,3549401,3549343,3549345,3585724,3573910,3315379,3629092,3195304,3195185

Richard Harrington (1911-2005) was one of Canada's most accomplished freelance photographers. Originally from Hamburg, Germany, his career path includes, among others, working for the Hudson's Bay Company, the *Beaver Magazine*, and the National Film Board in the 1950s. Harrington travelled to the Arctic on a number of expeditions, between 1948 and 1953, documenting his journeys through photographs and journals, which were later published as a book, *The Face of the Arctic* (1958). This image is part of Harrington's Coppermine series, photographed during his journey there in 1949. The photograph has also been reviewed by Project Naming, an initiative dedicated to bringing the Northern-Canadian Inuit community together in the goal of identifying people portrayed in the numerous photographs held by Library and Archives Canada.¹⁴ The six women portrayed here are, from left to right, Susie Kingogluk Evaglok, Agnes Topiak, Mary Anaktak, Kakagon, Martha Appatok Alonak, and Alice Ayalik.¹⁵ This close-up view of amused female subjects, whose faces are embraced by glamorous-looking fur hoods, wavers between a deliberate staging and a rather lucky shot of an intimate instance between local women.



Inuit man playing a drum with smiling woman in background, 1950.

Richard Harrington (1911-2005) Padlei, Nunavut.

Black and white photography. Library and Archives Canada. c. 3370318.

[http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.d
isplayItem&lang=nnn&rec_nbr=000003370318](http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=nnn&rec_nbr=000003370318)

This second photograph by Harrington seems to capture a similar intimate moment. The image represents the man playing a drum in what appears to be a traditional dancing ceremony, yet the caption insists on emphasizing the woman's smile.



Four smiling Inuit children in front of an unidentified building, 1949.

Gavin David White (n.d.) Clyde River, Nunavut.

Black and white photography.

Library and Archives Canada. c. 3613945.

http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/ourl/res.php?url_ver=Z39.88-

[2004&url_tim=2012-11-](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/ourl/res.php?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&url_tim=2012-11-)

[29T18%3A09%3A22Z&url_ctx_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rft_d](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/ourl/res.php?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&url_tim=2012-11-29T18%3A09%3A22Z&url_ctx_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rft_d)

[at=3613945&rfr_id=info%3Asid%2Fcollectionscanada.gc.ca%3Apam&lang=eng](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/ourl/res.php?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&url_tim=2012-11-29T18%3A09%3A22Z&url_ctx_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rft_dat=3613945&rfr_id=info%3Asid%2Fcollectionscanada.gc.ca%3Apam&lang=eng)

Gavin David White was a Canadian worker who emigrated from Glasgow, Scotland. His photographs document his journeys in Clyde River—from 1949 to 1951 he worked as a rawinsondes operator and in the construction camps on the eastern side of Dew Line, and from 1956 to 1957, as a chaplain with the Foundation Company of Canada.¹⁶ While a this image could lead one to presume the presence of local child laborers, a personal account from J.K. Leslie, a former Foundation Company of Canada employee on the Dew Line site, proves otherwise:

We kept a small cache of emergency rations in our Jamesway hut in case of extended isolation during blizzards. [...] When Inuit children stood statue-like outside our hut, we knew they came for any food we might provide—certainly not to admire two white CMC bods ugly enough to make a cat laugh. Tea, coffee, sugar, flour, and other non-perishables were received in silence and without expression.

A close observation of the younger child in the front right corner reveals that the boy has little crumbs on the lips of his huge, pleasing smile. Nonetheless, there is a sense of the unnatural in the group of smiles, as Gavin White has obviously posed the boys to capture this event. By this time, locals were used to the photographing practice and familiar with the Western custom of smiling for the camera. The smile has become a common reaction to the camera and as such the image itself becomes a record of the more aggressive cultural assimilation of the Inuit people, during this era.



Three Inuit men smiling, 1962.

Charles Gimpel. (-1973), Cape Dorset, Nunavut.

Black and White Photograph.

Library and Archives Canada. c. 3607031.

http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=000003607031

British amateur photographer and modern-art dealer Charles Gimpel (? - 1973) developed an interest for the Canadian Arctic, and his personal photographs from his numerous trips to Inuit communities from 1958 to 1969 depict Inuit artists in their daily life.¹⁷ The photograph depicts three Inuit men, genuflecting and smiling at the camera, in a studio-like room. The framing of these men suggests a certain bond between the subjects and the photographer. This could very well translate into an informal moment between the art dealer and the artists. The smiles in this picture appear to be genuine and spontaneous, bordering on laughter. This may suggest a sense of ease that these men have with Gimpel, who appears to be a participant in this informal gathering.



Smiling Inuit Women and Children, September 12, 1958.

Charles Gimpel (-1973), Igloolik, Nunavut.

Black and white Photograph.

Library and Archives Canada. c.3614196.

[http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=nnn&rec_nbr=000003614196&title=Smiling+Inuit+women+and+children+\[graphic+material\].+&ecopy=e004923411-v6&back_url=%28%29](http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=nnn&rec_nbr=000003614196&title=Smiling+Inuit+women+and+children+[graphic+material].+&ecopy=e004923411-v6&back_url=%28%29)

A contrasting image by Gimpel also portrays the unmistakable smile. This representation is even more natural than the first because the women are not aware of the camera, except for the one at the far left. The women's smiles and laughter are directed at the movements of the child whose lower body we see in the center of the photograph.

NOTES

¹ Expression used by Ruby Arngna'naaq (1978) in a public argument with artist-writer Alooktook Ipelie saying: "Alooktook sounds as though he is flustered by the fact that the "sweet smiling peoples of the far North" would be involved in a dispute [...] You see Alooktook, I live to break the myth about us. After all we are human, with all the usual human qualities and human faults. We just happen to have our own way of showing these faults and qualities." Nelson H Graburn, "Culture as Narrative," *Critical Inuit Studies: An Anthropology of Contemporary Arctic Ethnography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006) 153.

² An Inuit Education: Honoring the Past, Creating a Future," CBC Digital Archives (2011) <archives.cbc.ca>.

³ <www2.hbc.com/hbcheritage/history>.

⁴ <nanisiniq.tumblr.com/Timeline>; and <www.kativik.qc.ca>.

⁵ Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 111.

⁶ Lisa Slattery-Rashotte, "What does That Smile Mean? The Meaning of Nonverbal Behaviors in Social Interaction," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 65:1 (Mar. 2002): 93; American anthropologist, Jean L. Briggs, has spent seventeen months living on a remote Arctic shore as the "adopted daughter" of an Eskimo family. Through events of the Uktu daily life she writes about the behavioral patterns of these people, their way of training children, and their handling of problems in life; and Jean L. Briggs, *Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁷ In a chapter entitled "Frocks and Bangles", in *Depicting Canada's Children (2009)*, Sharon Murray writes about a photographic album by Christian missionaries in India. Her essay emphasizes on the intent of the photographer and its audience, also observed through semiotic contrast in the photographs. Sharon Murray, "Frocks and Bangles: The Photographic Conversion of Two Indian Girls," *Depicting Canada's Children* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010).

⁸ In its earlier stages, the Still Photography Division's aim was to boost domestic confidence and patriotic sentiment during the war yet post-WWII, the division's perspective shifted into documenting Canadian life with its tourism, dominant industries and natural resources. Library and Archives Canada "National Film Board of Canada. Photothèque." <collectionscanada.gc.ca>.

⁹ Danielle Corriveau, *The Inuit of Canada* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publication Company, 2002) 21.

¹⁰ Valerie Allia, *Un/Covering the North: News, Media and Aboriginal People* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999).

¹¹ Robert G. David, *The Arctic in the British Imagination, 1918-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 17.

¹² During WWII, there came to be a strategic military importance placed on the North, especially pertaining the Alaska boundaries. See Harold Griffin, Harold, *Alaska and the Canadian Northwest: Our New Frontier* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1944) for an account of the Canadian-American Alaska Boundaries dispute. Also see Richard J. Diubaldo, and S.J.Scheinberg, "A Study of Canadian-American Defense Policy (1945-1975): Northern Issues and Strategic Resources," Ottawa: Operational Research and Analysis Establishment Dept. of National Defense, 1978, regarding the dispute and Canadian strategies to assert territorial integrity.

¹³ Allia, 43; Valerie Allia, *Names and Nunavut: Culture and Identity in Arctic Canada* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007) 88.

¹⁴ "Project Naming," Library and Archives Canada, 22 Nov. 2005 <collectionscanada.gc.ca>.

¹⁵ Richard Harrington's named photograph by Project Naming.

¹⁶ Matthew J. Farish, P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Jennifer Arthur-Lackenbauer, *The Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line: A Bibliography and Documentary Resource List*, Arctic Institute of North America (Oct. 2005): 44.

¹⁷ It is noted that Ms. Gimpel had sparked her husband's interest in the Canadian Arctic and the gallery's decision to celebrate the coronation of Elizabeth II by hanging the first show of Inuit art, then known as Eskimo art, in London in 1953. Sandra Martin, "Obituaries: Kay Gimpel," *The Globe and Mail*, 4 Apr. 2009 <theglobeandmail.com>.

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