A Global Affair:
Understanding 1960’s Geopolitics Through the New York World’s Fair

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Introduction

You step off the subway and realize it has stopped raining on your trip from the city to Flushing Meadows. From your jacket pocket you pull two wrinkled dollar bills and hand them to the young blonde man working inside of the ticket office. The crowd has nearly doubled since you arrived and you realize that you are now stuck waiting, exactly where you are, until the Fair opens for the day. You stand on your toes, straining to peek over the head of the woman, with her two screaming kids, who stands in front of you in the line. Disappointingly, you can’t catch a glimpse of anything. All of a sudden you hear a loud whistle blow and the crowd begins to move. The gates to the 1964-1965 New York’s World Fair have opened and your first goal is to ride the Swiss Skyride. You run there as fast as you can, pay the seventy-five cent admission fee, hop on the ride and catch your breath as you are elevated into the sky for a four minute ride over the Fair. While in the sky you notice the Unisphere, the 12-story high steel globe that symbolizes the Fairs theme “Peace Through Understanding”. Below you is the area that houses the international pavilions and on the horizon line is a surprising full view of Manhattan. The first pavilion you plan to visit is the Jordan Pavilion. The whole city has been buzzing about the controversial mural on display. You are eager to see what all the fuss is about and why there is so much tension surrounding it. There is so much to taste, hear, see, and smell at the Fair and when you step off the Swiss Skyride and open your map you realize that the possibilities are endless.
The 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair was described as a “utopia”, a place where visitors could escape the harsh realities of the real world and feel a renewed sense of hope. Samuel Lawrence, author of *The End of America’s Innocence*, explains, “By side stepping the uninviting near future for a more palatable far-distant one, the Fair offered its millions of visitors an oasis of faith, optimism, hope, and confidence that utopia was not an entirely lost cause.” iii Sadly, problems arose with that ideal when the “uninviting near future” could not be “side stepped” due to the geopolitics of the 1960s. The Fair materialized in an era full of turmoil stemming from such conflicts as the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War. The contentiousness of these events created a discord among the nations at the Fair that could not have been predicted, or avoided, by the New York World’s Fair Corporation (WFC).

Escalating tensions between participating nations was not a new concept at World’s Fairs. During the 1867 Fair in Paris, which was the first World’s Fair to have separate national pavilions, Prussia proudly created a large display of Krupp guns. This created quite a controversy, as it appeared the Prussians were not embodying the idea of future peace among nations that the Fair was ardently striving for. iv In 1870, just three years after the Paris fair, those same Krupp guns were used against the French during the Franco-Prussian War. Looking back, and analyzing that conflict, it is clear that the apprehension felt in Paris foreshadowed future discord between the nations. Just as the Paris Fair reflected the context in which it transpired, so would the New York’s World Fair in the 1960s.

It can be deduced then, if one wants to learn about geopolitics of the 1960s one need not look any further than the 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair. Three conflicts central to the Fair
demonstrate the impact of contemporary geopolitics not just on the Fair, but also on American domestic politics and on international bodies as a result of the challenging interactions between the peoples, groups, and nations related to participation in the Fair from 1961 -1965.

The first encounter began a few years earlier at the Brussels’ World’s Fair in 1958. The United States pavilion paled in comparison to the USSR pavilion, and the United States was notably embarrassed. This Fair would be a chance for the United States to show its superiority, and the WFC was determined to make that happen. Analysis of the negotiations of Soviet participation reveal that the Fair was being shaped by the deep connection this conflict had to the ideologies of the Cold War. American domestic politics and Cold War politics were both apparent during the negotiations, beginning with the United States “courting” of the Soviet Union and ending with a proposed reciprocity agreement gone wrong.

Second, what would quickly become the most aggressive and unreserved conflict at the Fair would be triggered by a poem reflecting the history of Jordan and its current welfare in Palestine. The poem sparked outrage among the Jewish community in New York and specifically at the American-Israel Pavilion, which was sponsored by Jewish-Americans mostly from New York. The clash between the two pavilions and political leaders exhibited the tensions between Jews in the United States and Arabs in Palestine. It also showed that the conflict between the two groups would continue well into the future.

The third struggle linked the Fair and the Civil Rights Movement. The dominant national crusade would turn into a trans-national movement when a conflict regarding African Pavilion dancers caused United States civil rights leaders to step up and aide the dancers in their fight to gain political asylum.¹
Moses Begins Mobilizing

Robert Moses’ dream of designing and building the greatest park in New York began in 1934 while walking around Flushing Meadows in Queens, New York. Located on the precise geographic center of New York, the 1,346-acre piece of land was being used by the Fishhooks Brooklyn Ash Removal Company as a gigantic dumping ground and was peppered with piles of burning garbage.vi A prominent urban planner in New York at the time, Moses believed that his dream could be achieved by planning a magnificent World’s Fair that would be held at Flushing Meadows.vii

The first World’s Fair was the Great Exhibition of London in 1851. The exhibit space was an “airy house of glass” known as the Crystal Palace.viii The structure was monumental and called for the use of one third of all the glass England produced in a year.ix Fair attendance on May 1, 1851, opening day, was a half million people, which was an early indication of the popularity of the Exhibition. The London Fair cost a total of 1.6 million dollars, with receipts of 2.5 million dollars and a total of 6 million people visiting during its six month run.x After such success, popularity skyrocketed for future World’s Fairs. Each city wanted to plan a fair that was bigger and better than the previous fair. In 1853, New York decided it also wanted to host a World’s Fair and attempted to design its own version of the Crystal Palace. Sadly, it was not as successful as the London Fair and ended in financial failure. The 1889 World’s Fair in Paris would produce the Eiffel Tower, a 1,000-foot high design that was the world’s tallest structure.xi With all the competition to build things bigger and taller it appeared that the purpose of the World’s Fair had changed since London in 1851. What started as a tool to educate the rest of the world about other cultures and societies slowly transformed into a stage to boost a country’s
reputation and enhance its international competitiveness. This transformation created a need for an organization to oversee the planning of all future Fairs.

In November of 1928, at an international conference in Paris, thirty-one nations signed a treaty to become members of the Bureau of International Exposition (BIE). Although large-scale World’s Fairs had been occurring for seventy-seven years, an organization to establish a framework for each fair was needed due to increasing popularity, uncertainty and inevitable conflicts. Maurice Isaac, the first director of the BIE, explained:

“For a long time, international exhibitions followed no other rule than that laid down by the country in which they were organized. [...] The internal law of the country was alone in governing each event. An exhibition was international, not because its rules of organization were deliberated jointly by countries pursuing a common cause, but for the mere fact that different countries took part in it.”

Isaac believed that by establishing this organization it would create World’s Fair where nations would not only participate, but also would come together and work for a common cause. The treaty that the BIE composed included specific regulations that Fair planners would need to follow to become officially approved and sanctioned by the BIE. Most European nations signed the treaty in November of 1928. The United States was not one of the nations to sign.

In 1961, during the planning of the New York Fair, Moses and his committee members made two crucial decisions that did not coincide with BIE regulations. First, they decided that the Fair would extend for a total of two years, (the BIE had regulated that Fairs should extend no longer than six months), and second, they decided spaces for foreign exhibitors would be rented, which was in direct opposition to the BIE regulation that was against exhibitors paying rent. The WFC, including Robert Moses, decided that the average area to be leased to an international
exhibitor would be 50,000 square feet and each square foot would be three dollars per year.\textsuperscript{xvi} This would make the total cost to exhibit at the Fair for the full two years $300,000, which today would be approximately $2.1 million dollars.\textsuperscript{xvii} Prior to making these decisions Moses had not yet spoken to the BIE about receiving an official sanction, these decisions would soon prove to be a detriment to Moses and the Fair he had dreamed about.

Moses went to meet with the BIE in Paris. After that visit he stated that the BIE was, "three men living obscurely in a dumpy apartment in Paris."\textsuperscript{xviii} Moses was not willing to compromise on any of his decisions regarding Fair length and international pavilion rent. Shortly after his meeting in Paris the BIE formally asked all its members to not participate in the New York World’s Fair.\textsuperscript{xix} Within weeks of the BIE’s formal announcement Britain, France, and Italy, who all had been planning on participating and had been the largest and most popular exhibits at the last World’s Fair in New York, would drop out. The exodus would continue one by one with all the countries outside of the Iron Curtain, except for Spain.\textsuperscript{xx} After these decisions were made, Moses was quoted as saying that, "we are not disturbed by it" and "the Fair is going on nicely and does not require the support of the BIE".\textsuperscript{xxi} It became very clear that the Fair had lost its most popular and largest international participants in the blink of an eye, even though Moses would not acknowledge it. One man even stated, "With one press conference, he made the World’s Fair a Fair without Europe."\textsuperscript{xxii}

This lack of BIE support, and therefore lack of participation by major European BIE countries, forced the International division of the WFC to ask private groups from various countries to organize pavilions.\textsuperscript{xxiii} Therefore, instead of governments representing their countries, private investors were now the ones in charge of representation. This development was significant because the way these countries were exhibited to the public was not decided by the
nation, but instead by rich investors with biases. Which meant that the public was not getting the
truest or most authentic portrayal of the countries like they had expected. xxiv

**Cold War Politics at the Fair**

In his letter to the editor in February of 1958, concerned New Yorker, Lucien B. Padawer
noted what he had witnessed on his many trips abroad since 1947 and this was, “the slow, but
definite decline of America’s prestige in Europe.”xxv He also expressed his concern about the
United States Pavilion at the 1958 World’s Fair in Brussels, predicting that it would be a
“psychological disaster.” xxvi He believed that a poor showing by the United States in Brussels
would cause international doubt about the strength, power and development of the United
States. He concluded his letter by asking the United States, “Why is it that we seem always to wait until
it is too late?” xxvii Padawer’s insights foretold of a needed transformation within the United
States that would be crucial during the 1960s, where reputations were key.

Beginning slowly in the 1940s, and through the end of the 1950s, the Cold War had
turned into a habitual competition between the USSR and the United States. There were constant
arguments about which nation would be the most technologically advanced and which nation
would spread its political agenda to the most countries. Both the Soviet Union and the United
States wanted to be the victor and they would stop at nothing to show their superiority.xxviii

One year after Lucien B. Padawer wrote his letter regarding America’s decline, President
Dwight Eisenhower was called upon by the WFC to assess locations and plans for a possible
World’s Fair in 1964. As he reviewed plans he thought back to the Brussels Universal Exposition
of 1958 and the stark contrast between the two pavilions.xxix
The Soviets had displayed impressive military hardware and technology, which included a replica of Sputnik, the first man-made Earth satellite launched by the Soviet Union in October of 1957. While the United States pavilion focused on popular culture and the “high standard of living”. A *New York Times* article describes the USSR pavilion’s theme as “see how far we have come and look what we can do” and the United States pavilion as “this is what we are and this is how we live.” Padawer’s concerns were validated. It was clear that he had correctly predicted the United States showing at the 1958 Exposition. The stark contrast between the two pavilions allowed the Soviet Union to appear far more advanced technologically and intellectually than the United States. President Eisenhower believed that if a World’s Fair was held in New York City, and the Soviet Union had a pavilion, the United States would be able to better demonstrate its “prestige” and show that it could keep up with the competition that characterized the Cold War.

**The Negotiations Begin**

Arrangements for USSR participation in the 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair were planned before congress had even acted on a bill that authorized President Eisenhower to recognize it as a formal Fair. On September 17, 1959, at a luncheon for soviet leader, Premier Khrushchev, the mayor of New York informally invited the Soviet Union to participate in the Fair. Although Khrushchev believed the Soviet Union would accept, he explained that the acceptance of the invitation depended on a decision by the Soviet Council of Ministers. Khrushchev emphasized his democratic process of accepting the invitation stating, “You think badly of us when you say ours is not a democratic government.” U.S. policymakers, of course, did not agree with Soviet politics. Khrushchev was well aware of that fact. In years to
follow, the negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union regarding participation in the World’s Fair reflect the global dynamics of the Cold War and revealed the impact they had on American domestic politics and the Fair.

The Soviet Union’s formal acceptance of the Fair invitation, in July of 1960, marked the beginning of the rivalry between the USSR and the United States to have the best pavilion when the Fair opened in 1964. Reminiscent of Cold War politics, both the Americans and the Soviets kept their pavilion plans and architecture top secret, not even sharing the name of the building architect. xxxv The Soviet Union rented a total space of 78,000 square feet, (28,000 square feet more than what Fair regulations had permitted), and the United States, in turn, reserved 196,349 square feet. xxxvi In 1962 a Fair official stated, “You can be very well assured that in 1964, Russia will not have the highest building at the Fair.” xxxvii His comment depicted the antagonistic nature of the Fair and the Cold War.

Reciprocity Interferes

Reciprocity was key to the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States. This meant that mutual exchanges between the two nations were extremely important. The US State Department used this value of reciprocity to propose two American exhibits, one in Moscow and the other in Leningrad, in exchange for the USSR pavilion at the New York Fair. xxxviii The WFC understood that the USSR was the most compelling nation to have at the Fair and they publically stated that the reciprocity negotiations were strictly government business and not indicative of the politics or negotiations of the Fair itself. xxxix Recalling that one of the main reasons for this Fair was the redemption of the United States after the embarrassment at the
Brussels Exposition, the US did not want to lose the USSR as a participant, but there was nothing more they could do. It was out of their hands and in the hands of the State Department.

In October of 1962 the USSR announced it was withdrawing from the Fair. Disappointment resounded through the WFC members. Their reason for dropping out...they could not guarantee the arrangements outlined in the reciprocity agreement for an exhibition in Moscow. \(^{xi}\) The State Department did not believe, nor did they fully understand, the reasoning for the USSR’s withdrawal. What they did know is that they had made it clear that Soviet Union participation at the Fair was not contingent on the reciprocity agreement. \(^{xii}\) The State Department also believed that the USSR had withdrawn for other reasons. One theory was that they could have “re-assigned” the 20 million dollars from their pavilion towards technological advances instead. \(^{xiii}\) The US government’s actions in attempting to find mutual cooperation with the USSR had failed and had impacted the World’s Fair. Despite strong efforts by Moses’ and other WFC members the Soviet Union did not change their mind and never displayed at the 1964-1965 World’s Fair.

During the early 1960’s both US and Soviet politicians made claims to a belief in the idea of peaceful co-existence. Both countries said that that wanted to ease tensions between them and even possibly negotiate nuclear test ban treaties, particularly in the wake of the near cataclysm of the Cuban missile crisis. \(^{xiii}\) The goal for co-existence collapsed when both countries realized that the competition was not going to slow down anytime soon. The negotiations at the Fair reveal both the highs and the lows of Cold War diplomacy: the USSR and US seemingly tried to co-exist on the innocuous grounds of a World’s Fair, but because of the underlying agendas they failed. We can take this as one illustrative example to better understand how tensions at a crucial
stage of the Cold War created uncertainty for both countries and ultimately the competitive
nature of the relationship worked against an agreement being made.

The Mural of Refugee

You hop off the Swiss Skyride and walk for a few minutes until you find the Hashemite
Kingdom of Jordan’s Pavilion nestled between the pavilions of Sudan and the United Arab
Republic. You gaze at the magnificent multi-peaked-and-domed structure covered with gold
mosaic and colored glass. You head inside to examine the Dead Sea Scrolls, watch Arab dancers
perform, indulge in some Middle Eastern delicacies such as homas, (mashed chickpeas
mixed with spices and oil), or shaurmah, (spiced
and barbecued lamb), and to find the mural that has created such an uproar between the Jewish
and Arab community.\textsuperscript{xliv}

As you are exiting the pavilion you see it… the mural. It includes a poem and an image
of a mother, looking down as if she has been defeated, holding a child. The first stanza of the
poem reads: "\emph{Before you go, have you a minute to spare, to hear a word on Palestine and
perhaps to help us right a wrong?}" You continue to read and discover that “strangers from
abroad” have victimized the people of Palestine for many years. Although these “strangers” are
never named in the poem, you have heard that the poem was pointedly directed at Jewish people
living in Israel. It is apparent that the long history of conflict between Israel and the Arab world
had made its way inside the fairgrounds.
The Poem

The poem exhibited in the pavilion was nine stanzas. Each stanza roughly corresponded with a fragment of Palestine's history, beginning with the birth of Christ and ending with the political state of Palestine in the 1960s. To better understand the poem and the series of conflicts that occurred at the Fair and in New York because of this poem, it is important to understand the history of the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. As communicated previously, this poem was displayed at the Jordan Pavilion and therefore is not without bias.

"Ever since the birth of Christ and later with the coming of Mohammed, Christians, Jews and Moslems, believers in one God, lived together there [Palestine] in peaceful harmony."

There is a long history of Christians, Jews and Moslems sharing Jerusalem together in peace.

"For centuries it was so, until strangers from abroad, professing one thing, but underneath, another, began buying up land and stirring up the people. Neighbors became enemies and fought against each other, the strangers, once thought terror's victims, became terror's fierce practitioners."

In the late 1800s, Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jew and journalist, published Der Judenstaat, (The Jewish State), which called for the creation of a separate Jewish State. In his book Herzl states, "The idea which I have developed in this pamphlet is a very old one: it is the restoration of the Jewish State." He believed the Jewish problem was not an individual problem, but instead a national problem. In response to Herzl's book, the First Zionist Congress met in Basle, Switzerland in 1897 to discuss the proposal of a Jewish State that could be a refuge from the anti-Semitism and bigotry they endured. The culmination of the meeting was the Basle Program, which established a "home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured by public law" and the establishment of the World Zionist Organization. Zionist's began moving to parts of modern day Palestine almost immediately and lived in peace with the Arab people until
WWI when there were nearly 80,000 Jews living there and it appeared more would be migrating there soon.

After nearly 75 years of Ottoman Rule over Palestine, Britain gained control of the region by the end of World War I. In late 1917, the British Balfour Declaration stated that Britain would facilitate and support the establishment of a national homeland for Jews in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration led to a mass migration of Jewish immigrants from Europe and some diplomatic historians argue that it was the first major step toward the establishment of a Jewish homeland in the twentieth century.

“Seeking peace at all costs, including the cost of justice, the blinded world, in solemn council, split the land in two, tossing to one side the right of self-determination.”

“Splitting the land in two” was a direct result of Resolution 181 mandated by the UN in 1947. The resolution determined that Palestine would be divided into a two separate states. The Jewish State would cover 56.47% of Palestine, (which excluded Jerusalem). It had a population of 498,000 Jews and 325,000 Arabs. The Arab State would cover 43.53% of Palestine, (which also excluded Jerusalem), with 807,000 Arab inhabitants and 10,000 Jewish inhabitants. The Arabs argued that the Jews were a minority and owned only a fraction of the land; therefore they should not be given the “best part” of Palestine, which included nearly all citrus land, 80% of the central area and 40% of Arab Industry. This resolution caused Arabs to believe they were no longer in charge of determining their own culture or society’s growth and future. After this declaration was passed the UN suffered a major loss of prestige by the Arab world and so did the United State because of its involvement with providing money and weapons to the Jewish community in Palestine.

“What followed then perhaps you know. Seeking to redress the wrong, our nearby neighbors Tried to help us in our cause, and for reasons, not in their control, did not succeed.”
On May 15, 1948, a day after the State of Israel proclaimed independence; Arab armies from Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq went to war for Jordan and attacked the new state. 43 Israeli forces defeated the Arab armies. The Arabs largely blamed the United States and Britain for their defeat because of the aid the two nations had given to Israel. This came to be known as the Palestine War. 44

“Today, there are a million of us, some like us, but many like my mother, wasting their lives in exiled misery waiting to go home.”

The Palestine War and the immigration of Jews caused a massive displacement of Arabs in Palestine. The Arab people had to flee from their homes and had nowhere to live. 45

“But even now, to protect their gains ill-got, as if the land was theirs and had the right, they're threatening to disturb the Jordan's course and make the desert bloom with warriors.”

Another concern became Israel’s ongoing project to divert Jordan waters to the Negev. This worried the Arabs because the diversion would deprive Jordan of water it badly needed. Allowing this would cause Israel to draw a larger number of immigrants that, in turn, would lead them to have a larger and stronger military. 46

“And who's to stop them? The world seems not to care, or is blinded still. That's why I'm glad you stopped and heard the story.” 47

Poetic Propaganda

Three days after the Fair began the American-Israeli pavilion officials had already asked that the mural be removed because they believed it was malicious propaganda. Robert Moses had also received a telegram from officials of the American-Israel Pavilion that said, “…the use of the fairgrounds for the dissemination of such propaganda runs counter to the spirit of the Fair as expressed in the theme, ‘Peace Through Understanding’ and counter to the regulations.” In
addition, Bernard Katzen, Vice Chairmen of the State Commission for Human Rights, explained that the mural in the Jordan Pavilion “is an arrogant piece of propaganda injected into the Fair arena.” What seems clear is that the case was made. The poem resembled blatant propaganda...yet, in its simplest form, propaganda is merely dissemination of an idea or information for or against something. Each pavilion at the Fair was displaying something to disseminate a message about their country, which would mean that everything at the Fair was some form of propaganda.

The conflict escalated as months passed and Fair officials allowed for the mural to remain, but they allowed for leaflets to be distributed at the Fair, responding to the mural’s supposed message. Levi Eshkol, the premier of Israel, even canceled his trip to the Fair because of the controversy between the two pavilions. The board chairman of the American-Israel World’s Fair Corporation, Harold S. Caplin, wrote a poem of his own to be displayed at the American-Jewish Pavilion. The poem read, “We hail all our neighbors here at this Fair. We degrade them not and ask the same in return. And to one and all, pledge our hope through “Peace Through Understanding”.” By displaying this poem Caplin simultaneously promoted peace among the nations and mocked the poem at the Jordan Pavilion.

On May 25, 1964, the American Jewish Congress, an organized group of Jewish American’s that work to defend Jewish interests in the United States and abroad through public policy advocacy, disregarded Fair regulations and went to the Jordan Pavilion to picket the “offensive and malicious materials displayed”. Although a police officer stopped them before the demonstration, their intended actions resulted in twelve Jewish leaders, including the President of the Congress, being arrested. The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, an
American organization that fights the defamation of Jewish people, brought suit to have the mural removed as well.

The Arab community responded to their opponents' claims with demonstrations and public statements. The committee on American and Arab Relations picketed the American Jewish Committee and Anti Defamation League in New York. Alford Carleton, President of the American Friends of the Middle East argued in a letter to the editor of the New York Times that there was nothing offensive about the mural. He explained that it just states the facts of what life in Jordan and the Arab world is like and that a visitor is not forced to look at it if they do not want to. He believed that the people objecting to the mural were, “the same individuals and organizers who are reluctant to acknowledge any moral or other responsibility for the thousands of Arab refugees who were forced to flee Israel.”9xv Despite on-going controversy, the mural endured for the entire Fair.

The controversy between the Jordan Pavilion and the American-Israel Pavilion allowed for the intersection of Jewish and Arab leaders from the United States, Jordan, and Israel. Although the poem characterized the long engagement between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, the Fair created a new context in which the conflict played out, one deeply impacted by American politics. The antagonism evidenced at the Fair, and the seemingly intractable nature of the differences made starkly visible in the poem controversy, hinted at something deeper and darker: there would likely be ongoing and perhaps worsening tension and strife between the two nations.

Civil Rights and South Africa

On September 8, 1964, almost a month after the New York World’s Fair closed for the “off-season”, twenty-two Zulu Dancer’s who had worked at the African Pavilion arrived at
Kennedy International Airport to board a plane and begin their journey back home to South Africa. As the plane took off, eleven dancers had not boarded.\textsuperscript{lxxvi} They refused to go back to South Africa and endure daily persecution from their government. They chose to remain in the United States and create opportunities for themselves. What they could not have known was that they would also encounter difficulties as they sought refuge within the United States. Six men were permitted to stay in the United States on student visas or because they had married American citizens, but another six men would need to fight for political asylum in the months to follow.\textsuperscript{lxxvii} Luckily, leaders of a national movement that challenged everything the South Africans were fleeing from would help them with their fight to stay in the United States.

In 1948, the South African Nationalist Party enacted a series of laws known as the Apartheid Laws, which institutionalized racial discrimination. These laws regulated rights such as; mixed marriages, black entrance into specific areas specified for whites and the requirement of blacks to carry a passbook at all times, which was similar to a passport.\textsuperscript{lxxviii} While the fighting and discrimination in South Africa continued on into the mid 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, which was working to end racial discrimination against Black Americans, was making great strides. In July of 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, stating in his address, “We believe that all men are entitled to the blessings of liberty...yet millions are being deprived of those blessings, not because of their own failure but because of the color of their skin.” The Civil Rights Act was a huge success for the leaders and citizens of the United States who had been fighting that battle for so long. Unfortunately, other countries had not taken this step forward in the fight to end racial discrimination.

The dancers arrived in the United States in January of 1964 when Mary K. Frank, a producer from New York, brought twenty-two Zulu dancers from Johannesburg to be part of the
troupe for her play "Sponono". When the show closed sixteen days later, the twenty-two Zulus were forced to look for other jobs, as required by their visas. Frank suggested that the performers be used in the African Nations Pavilion at the New York’s World Fair, but African pavilion officials had banned South Africa from being a part of the pavilion since it was not a "black African nation". Fortunately, the African Fair officials changed the minds and let the Zulus participate and dance at the pavilion. The African Zulu Dancers were immensely popular during the Fair’s first season and plans were made for the dancers to return the next spring to perform at the pavilion again. Little did they know the struggle that would pursue just to make that happen.

A Little Help from Mr. King

Compared to the lack of support the men received from their own government in South Africa, the Zulu Dancers experienced overwhelming support from major leaders of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. In April of 1965, the same month the Fair reopened for its second season and the month their deportation hearing began, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. appealed to 20,000 supporters of the civil rights cause for funds and backing to aid in providing political sanctuary for the Zulu dancers. To make people understand it’s importance and bring this fight “home” Dr. King stated in a fund-raising letter that, “from the front-line of Selma, Ala., or Greenwood Miss., it is sometimes hard to think about the plight of others fighting for freedom.” His words signified that in the midst of a battle it is difficult to thinking about the bigger picture or the global scale of a conflict, yet it is all of our responsibility to help those who cannot help themselves.
During the deportation hearings the South African men and experts testified and validated the persecution the men would face if sent back to South Africa. One of the dancers, Victor B. Shange, explained, “If we went back to Johannesburg, the police would meet us at the airport. They would beat the living day lights out of us. This is an absolute certainty. They would say we were trying to tear down their government.” A Cape Town lawyer, who was a founding member of the South Africa’s Multiracial Liberal Party, but who now lived in the United States also testified and stated that if these men were deported they would be faced with a “very real risk” of official persecution. On May 4, 1965 eight more civil rights leaders came forward and sent a telegram to Secretary of State Dean Rusk asking him to recommend asylum for the Zulu Dancers.

In late May, District Director of Immigration and Naturalization Service, P.A. Esperdy, announced the withdrawal of the deportation proceedings against the South African Zulu dancers and stated, “The entertainers were working at the African Pavilion of the World’s Fair. Since other aliens have been permitted to resume work at the Fair it was felt that the South Africans were entitled to equal treatment.” His given reason for dropping the case may not have been what they were fighting for, but the men were given sanctuary and were not deported back to their homeland.

Five South African citizens evaded persecution by leaving a country that discriminated against them because of the color of their skin. Their refuge was the United States, a country that was in the middle of a tumultuous national movement led by prominent African-Americans.
fighting to end the racial discrimination based on skin color. The Fair created a scenario that impacted the United States, the Civil Rights Movement and South Africa. Without the backing of prominent Civil Rights Movement leaders—some of the leading figures in the movement—these South African men would surely have been deported. The decision by US Immigration and Naturalization Services to drop the case was a monumental decision for its time. By supporting these men the Civil Rights Movement sent a message to South Africa that what their government was doing was not right. It was not fair. It was not justified. They also sent a strong and clearly effective message at home in achieving the victory of preventing deportation. Civil Rights leaders, here in the United States, were fighting for the abolishment of racial discrimination in South Africa from thousands of miles away.

**Conclusion**

On October 17, 1965, a day before the Fair completed its two-year run and would forever close its gates to the public, a 90-inch long torpedo-shaped time capsule was lowered into the ground at Flushing Meadows. The capsule was referred to as ‘Time Capsule II’. Two decades earlier ‘Time Capsule I’ had been placed in the same location after the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair. Dr. Leonard Carmichael, vice president of research and exploration of the National Geographic Society lead a 14-man committee to select the artifacts that would be placed in the time capsule. When the arduous selection process was completed, ‘Time Capsule II’ held twice as many artifacts as ‘Time Capsule I’. Dr. Carmichael explained that this was due to the fact that, “so much more has happened, especially in the field of scientific progress in the last two decades than in the preceding two.” Although the capsule included the common artifacts that were
related to American daily life, it more importantly showcased the progress that the United States had made in Atomic Energy, Space, and Scientific Developments during the postwar era.

Since ‘Time Capsule I’ had been buried, the United States had experienced and recovered from a Depression and a second devastating World War. The nation also confronted massive new challenges. The Cold War, Korean War, Space Race, Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Civil Rights Movement were just a few of the many recent and ongoing struggles, groping toward maintaining world power, peace, and prosperity, while achieving greater “progress” (variously defined and debated) at home as well as abroad. It was evident that the geopolitics of the postwar era increased competition among nations leading to increased tensions as well.

Examining and analyzing the geopolitics of any era on a large scale can be demanding and complicated. The international relations from era to era continue to change, and these changes create new connections, as well as new conflicts between countries. The 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair offers a unique lens to examine the geopolitics of the 1960s on a smaller scale. This glimpse allows audiences the opportunity to better understand the concept of international relations during the 1960s. The competition and failed negotiations between the USSR and the United States characterizes the arms race between the two nations and the fundamentals of Cold War politics. The Arab world was foreign to Americans; the United States was allied with Israel; obvious problems abounded in how American politicians and citizen’s thought about the “proper” U.S. role in the Middle East. The American-Israel Pavilion and the Jordan Pavilion, then, provide a lens to examine not just the crisis and views of Fair-goers but also observe specific understandings and challenges over how to best understand and interpret the long historical relationship between Arabs and Jews...again on a much smaller scale. The poem told the story of the how the Arab people felt, directly from their perspective and the
reaction of the Jewish population, (even in New York), keenly displayed the tug-of-
war. Through the story of the South African dancers one can gain a great understanding of the
impact that apartheid played in South Africa. It also demonstrates how national actions, such as
the Civil Right Movement, can send a message far beyond the borders of the United States and
possibly stir a need for change in a nation so far away. Dr. Martin Luther King was on the front
lines of the Civil Rights Movement here in the United States, but still stepped forward to help
other countries fight to end discrimination.

Judging this Fair as either a failure or a success is not what this paper aims to accomplish.
that Moses’ Fair, was not a “total success” neither “aesthetically or financially”. Other
claims of failure, such as that of Goldberger’s, generally center on the Fair’s inability to make a
profit (and thusly failing to pay back its investors). We must remember that the Fair had its share
of successes as well, for it allowed the audience to have an up-front experience with cultural
exchanges and new technology, creating a more educated and socially aware society.

We should not allow ourselves to create a false dichotomy of “good or bad”/ “failure or
success” for this World’s Fair. Instead what this paper has shown is that what happened at this
Fair, and what it revealed to all those who attended and to the world around us, was much more
complicated than success or failure. It is important that we recognize the ways that the Fair
illuminates broader as well as specific patterns in the geopolitics of the era. So, too, we must
acknowledge the possibility that this World’s Fair changed the outcome, at least in some small
measure, of escalating conflicts that were in the forefront of international and domestic relations
of the time, and may have changed the way we look (and have looked) at these conflicts for
generations to come.
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After a long day at the Fair you decide it’s time to start your journey back to the hustle and bustle of the city. Before you walk out of the gates and back to the “real world”, you decide to sit on a bench under the Unisphere and flip through your Official Guide Book one last time. You tilt your head back to look up at the Unisphere and realize that you feel a twinge of disappointment by the lack of European participation at the Fair. You wonder, “How are these nations supposed to understand each other and work towards peace if many of the most influential nations aren’t even here participating?” You think back to the poem displayed at the Jordan pavilion and are saddened by the campaign that has arisen because of these two nation’s tumultuous history. Perhaps, what has really happened is that a day you had hoped would be a “get away to a utopia” has actually turned into a broadened awareness of the real turmoil that is happening everyday in the world around you.

A stoic Moses’ stands in front of the Unisphere, a symbol of unity and hope at the 1964-1965 New World’s Fair. The New Yorker.
ENDNOTES


ii Official Guide New York World’s Fair (Time Incorporated: New York, 1964), 15. The Official Guide Book provided details about the day-to-day business at the World’s Fair, such as the duration of Fair, when the Fair opened and closed each day and ticket prices. For a visitor the Official Guide provided maps, details about various exhibits and suggestions about what else to see or do on a visit to New York.


v Previous literature has been published about conflicts between international pavilions at the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair. This paper differs from material previously presented because it examines the history of each conflict in the context of the 1960s and how that in turn impacts the United States, the Fair and international bodies. Lawrence R. Samuels’ book, The End of Innocence, included a chapter titled “Global Holiday”, which detailed the popular pavilions in the International Plaza. This provided useful leads for further research of the conflict between the USSR and United States. Emily Alice Katz’s article, “It’s a Real World After All”, analyzed the controversy surrounding the Jordan Pavilion and the American-Israel Pavilion. Katz’s article focuses on how the conflict shaped the American and international opinion of the conflict. Her article does go into greater detail about the conflict at the Fair, but she does not analyze the poem. The website “nywf64”, a site dedicated entirely to the 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair, posted unpublished essay titled, “International Participation in the New York World’s Fair 1964-1965”, written by New York University student, Sharyn Elise Jackson. Although she does mention in her conclusion that the Fair was impacted by actions of the American government, she does not connect the international conflicts at the Fair to the geopolitics of the 1960s throughout her paper. Nowhere during the research process did literature about the African Pavilion dancers come up. In various scholarly literatures about the Fair, the USSR and the Jordan conflicts are the two most well researched and discussed, quite likely because of the high stakes and enduring problems of the geopolitics involved in those two cases.


vii Ibid, 1082.


ix Ibid, 89.


xiii Ibid.

xiv Ibid.

xv Caro, 1093.

xvii The number was calculated by using the inflation calculator provided by the United States Department of Labor. http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

xviii Caro, 1094.

xix Caro, 1094.


xxi Ibid, 1.

xxii Caro, 1094.

xxiii Charles Poletti to Executive Committee, November 13, 1962, World's Fair Corporation: Executive Committee Reports, 45-2. Poletti's memorandum to the Executive Committee members explained the impact of the Bureau of International Exposition's decision not to sanction the Fair.

xxiv Pavilions that were represented by nations were not without biases, but I am noting that private investigators likely had different aims and biases when monetarily backing a pavilion.


xxvi Ibid, E8.

xxvii Ibid, E8.


xxx Ibid, 124-163.


xxiii Ibid, 19.

xxiv Ibid, 19.


xxvi Ibid, 58.

xxvii Ibid, 58.


xxix Ibid, 1.

Ibid, 1.

Ibid, 1.


Official Guide New York World's Fair


Ibid, 69.


Ibid, 4.


Khouri, 54.


Khouri, 49.

"UN Partition Plan."

Khouri, 57.

Khouri, 70.

Khouri, 100-101. The Soviet Union was pro-Israel during this time, which Arabs seemed to largely ignore because of their focus on blaming the US and Britain. Soviet support in the UN after the partition was passed and the sale of Communist bloc weapons when Israel desperately needed weapons helped immensely in Israel's cause.

Ibid, 57.

Khouri, 225.

Research was conducted to find the author of the poem at the Jordan Pavilion, but the author was not found.


Alford Carleton "Dispute Over Jordan's Mural." *New York Times*, May 6, 1964, 46. Carleton was the President of the American Friends of the Middle East organization. He wrote this letter to the editor of the New York Times expressing his feelings about the mural.


Burrows, 19.

Ibid, 19.


"African Describes Dangers to 5 Zulus.", 38.


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