

and “Degreed” people (working in social justice-related fields) who wish to critically interrogate their roles.

Aronsen, Lawrence. 2010. *City of Love and Revolution: Vancouver in the Sixties*. Vancouver: New Star Books. ISBN 978-1-55420-048-1. Paperback: 24.00 CAD. Pages: 208.

Mills, Sean. 2010. *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montréal*. Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press. ISBN 978-0-7735-3965-1. Paperback: 29.95 CAD. Pages: 302.

Reviewed by Douglas Nesbitt  
Queen’s University

These two city-focused studies provide invaluable contributions to an emerging literature on Canada and Quebec’s “sixties” – an ambiguously periodized “decade” sometimes beginning as early as 1956 and often extending well into the 1970s.

Each historian clearly identifies his sixties in relation to various phases in the history of their respective city’s conception of the left. For Aronsen, Vancouver’s “sixties” extend loosely from 1963 to the fall of Saigon in 1975. Yet, most of his research focuses upon the years 1967 to 1972. Montréal’s radical “decade” also begins in 1963, a year in which the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) is formed and the electorally-oriented Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale (RIN) becomes increasingly engaged with the anti-colonial ideas of Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon and others. Mills does not declare the “sixties” to be over in 1972, but concludes his study with the Common Front general strikes of that year.

Aronsen’s work focuses primarily on the cultural transformations of post-war society, overturning a staid Protestant Vancouver. Following a tour through Kitsilano’s emergence as the centre of Vancouver’s hippie scene, we move to the east side where the Vancouver Free University (VFU) emerged to meet the needs of the local community in an equally counter-cultural – though not explicitly radical – leftist way. This distinction sets the VFU apart from other free university experiments in North America, including Toronto’s Rochdale College, which were

explicitly tied to the political projects and organizations of the New Left. As a consequence, the VFU had an important influence upon the emergence of community-centred education reform under the provincial NDP government elected in 1972 – the same year that VFU collapsed. With more care than in previously published studies of the Sixties, we're also treated to the transformations in sexual attitudes and practices and drug use. Aronsen is particularly adept at contrasting the emerging women's liberation movement (including the VFU's popular childcare and child-rearing courses) with an enduring but transforming misogyny within the counter-culture and New Left.

Aronsen ends his book with chapters on the short-lived Vancouver Yippies and their relationship to the 1971 Gastown Riot, and the city's anti-war movement in its three major phases, including its Communist-led phase in the early 1960s, its increasingly NDP-backed phase in the late 1960s and the large-scale anti-nuclear demonstrations of the early 1970s.

Well-researched and presented in an accessible, narrative form, Aronsen's account is richly infused with a constant awareness of geography. Anyone with a cursory knowledge of Vancouver's neighbourhoods and major streets will find it a pleasure to read. Yet, *The City of Love and Revolution* appears to be limited to the political boundaries of Vancouver as opposed to Greater Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. Readers may be surprised by the work's silence on the student-faculty protests at Simon Fraser University.

With the exception of the chapter on the anti-war movement and recurring appearances by Vancouver's left-wing city councilor Harry Rankin, Aronsen's work lacks a substantive exploration of the relationship between the counter-cultural and New Left with the wider and larger "Old Left" institutions, including the Communist Party, the NDP and organized labour. As a consequence, wider political realignments culminating in the provincial NDP's 1972 victory and the reconstitution of labour following the postal workers strike of 1965 are largely absent. In fairness to Aronsen, the lack of research on the evolving relations between a youth-centred counter-culture and New Left and the Old Left and organized labour remains a central problem confronting the emerging Sixties historiography as a whole.

Sean Mills steers clear of the counter-culture to engage with the "formal" politics of Montréal's social movements. *The Empire Within* is divided into two sections. The first section, spanning 1963 to 1968, explores how decolonization struggles in Algeria, Cuba and elsewhere had a profound impact upon the intellectual underpinnings of Quebec's

nationalist left. Case studies concerning this process include the short-lived but influential magazine *Parti Pris*, the various elements of the RIN, as well as the early FLQ. The second section transitions from an intellectual history to a well-executed account of the major confrontations between popular and state forces, including the “Black Renaissance” sparked by the Sir George Williams Affair in early 1969, the emergence of a powerful women’s movement and the battles surrounding language such as Opération McGill français and Bill 63. The final two chapters recount the October Crisis and the 1972 Common Front strikes.

While placing the role of postcolonial thought at the centre of his arguments about the trajectory of Montréal’s complicated terrain of oppositional politics, the intellectual debates of 1963-68 are segregated from the debates over praxis between 1968 and 1972. For example, while offering a well-supported and convincing critique of the FLQ’s urban guerrilla tactics as a strategic blunder with relation to the city’s large-scale labour and social movements, Mills disconnects the FLQ’s actions from the various (and contested) theorizations of violence as a revolutionary tactic espoused by postcolonial thinkers explored in earlier chapters of the book. The result is a missed opportunity to extend the exploration of postcolonial theory to an exploration of postcolonial practice. In Mills’ work, therefore, there is no sense of debate regarding the political strategies of decolonization, whether the Montréal’s short-lived municipal left party – Front d’action politique (FRAP) – or the revolutionary syndicalism of organized labour and urban guerrilla strategies.

Each work makes an immense contribution to an emerging subfield in Canadian and Québécois historiography. Mills, in particular, usefully reinterprets Quebec’s experience within a left-nationalist milieu influenced heavily by decolonization struggles and the political distillations and theorizations of such experiences. Aronsen’s detailed local focus lays the groundwork for further avenues of study for the 1970s, a transitional decade from the post-war settlement to neoliberalism in desperate need of rigorous historical research.

There remains, however, an ongoing friction between emphases upon a generational interpretation of the Sixties in which cultural norms are transformed in enormous and lasting ways, and the “political Sixties” in which radical anticolonial, left nationalist, working-class and New Left forces represent an acute challenge to the global system of empire and race. Perhaps, as both Mills and Aronsen’s work implicitly suggest, a resolution may be found by extending our periodization of the Sixties well into the 1970s in order to grasp the extent to which the women’s liberation

movement was, arguably, the deepest transformation in both the cultural and political realms to emerge from the late 1960s.