

BOOK REVIEW

Palmer, Bryan D. 2009. *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. ISBN 9780802096593. Paperback 35.00 CAD. Pages 605.

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Bryan Palmer has taken on the 1960s with a variety of aims, particularly to explore the impact the explosive events of that era had on the Canadian national identity. He maintains that the outcome was a shedding of the old identity, but there was lack of clarity about the new one. In what he terms a work of 'interpretive history,' Palmer examines an intriguing variety of people and events in order to discuss their influence on this changing identity. Some of the choices are obvious: Pierre Trudeau, the Cold War, and New Left radicals; while others are more surprising, such as Gerda Munsinger and the chapter on 'Scandalous Sex' or George Chuvalo's epic 1966 boxing match with Muhammad Ali as a marker of sport reflecting ideas about race, identity and Canada's relationship to the United States.

Palmer also wants to use the concept of irony, not in its postmodernist invocation, but a more Marxist approach that looks at the destabilizations arising out of the logic of capitalist accumulation and relations of class and oppression, as well as the historical contingencies in its interpretation and ideology. To begin this, he reviews the social construction of history and of the pre-1960s unitary ('One Canada') identity based on the north, the frontier, survival and links to Europe, especially the British Empire. He then, in a section called 'Mid-Century Myopias,' notes how this construction served many specific purposes, and was 'always at odds with a mix of defiant realities' (17). For the rest of the book, he examines these realities.

There are three major sections within the book: the antecedents, including money and the Cold War, the politics and culture of the mid-1960s, focusing on destabilizing changes in sexualities, race/identity, and the Philosopher Kings McLuhan and Trudeau. The second section discusses the tumult exhibited by youth hooliganism and class struggles. Finally, he examines radicalism, revolution, and Red Power (the New Left, Quebec nationalism, and 'the Discovery of the Indian').

The examples chosen are interesting, as noted above; many are the ones most remembered (whether actually experienced or not), others are unexpected. In the first section he highlights money in the context of the transition from dependence on the British influence to dependence on investment from the United States, the devaluation of the Canadian dollar, and the arrival of 'Diefenbucks.' Palmer also sees the Cold war as a time of Canadian struggle for independence from the United States and the conscious creation of Canada as a distinctive 'middle power.' In this light, Palmer directs our attention to the Avro Arrow jet, anti-Communism and its implications for the labour movement, sovereignty in the north, and the building of bomb shelters (Dief reappears with the Deifenbunker). The Munsinger sex scandal reveals exaggerated Cold War fears and the rethinking of women's sexuality.

Again, the need to differentiate Canada from the US is a major part of the discussion of the Chuvalo/Ali boxing fight: when the US was contesting Ali's political opinions as a threatening Black man, Canada welcomed him. At the same time, Chuvalo was considered a hero for standing up and taking it, despite his loss of the heavyweight fight itself. In doing so, Chuvalo also challenged traditional Canadian notions of 'whiteness.'

The mass marketing of celebrity and use of the media are central to the analysis of McLuhan and Trudeau—the latter of whom was 'born to run (in style)' (156). Audacity was central to both, especially as Canadians compared their Trudeau to Nixon of the United States. The combination of Trudeau and Expo '67 produced the 'pyrotechnics of a Canadian identity struggling to be born' (169).

The section on 'Tumult' deals with youth rebelliousness; from the creation of the teenager and the demographics of consumption, through to juvenile delinquency, Victoria Day riots (especially in Montreal) and wildcatting young workers. Particularly with the arrival of the hippies, old identities were discarded without the creation of new ones. Increased commerce brought more working class youth into paid jobs, especially young men, which along with more young people in higher education brought unrest to many venues, whether workplaces, campuses or the streets.

The final section highlights what Palmer considers as revolutions. By far the longest chapter in the book (86 pages) considers the New Left, including the student movements (especially the Student Union for Peace Action), the Waffle, and women. Decolonization, anti-racism, anti-war activities and participatory democracy are addressed alongside the

government cooptation of youth movements into the Company of Young Canadians. The next (and next-longest) chapter considers the explosion in Quebec, from the Quiet Revolution to the FLQ. Class development and upsurge, tension in the universities, the role of the intelligentsia and of organized labour are placed alongside the many social crises in the province. The subsequent chapter on the rise of Red Power somewhat parallels the Quebec discussion with issues of colonialism, new leadership, the rising power of youth, the reinvention and redefinition of the political, and a refusal to be incorporated into the 'Canadian'.

Summing up, and returning directly to national identity, Palmer moves directly from the 'imagined Canada' of Expo to the implosion of Canadian identity as exemplified by the War Measures Act. In doing so, he reasserts that the old identity was discarded without the surety of a new one. Perhaps it is/was not possible, at least in the traditional sense of identity and nation.

Overall, the book is a prestigious example of scholarship, wonderfully documented by 143 pages of notes, and the author's turn of phrase is practically perfect. Despite the 430 pages of text, I could not put it down, finishing it in two days. Any broadly sweeping work like this will always be subject to critique regarding topics that should have been addressed more fully. I would have preferred more coverage of women's issues, particularly women in Quebec, and the conditions of GLBTQ people. However, this book is most highly recommended for students, faculty, and the general interest reader.