BOOK REVIEWS

Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills & Scott Rutherford, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009).

Do you like your 'Sixties' hard-boiled or over easy; well-done or *bleu*? No matter, the menu of this eclectic collection accommodates most tastes.

That is both the strength and the weakness of this compilation, gathered together from the many papers presented to the June 2007 Queen's University conference on the Global Sixties. The editors revel in the complicated nature and legacies of the 1960s, and while they offer few injunctions about what the decade actually was, they are adamant about three key interpretive matters.

First, they construct the memory and scholarship of the Sixties as a "dominant logic" that they challenge. That logic is perhaps best (if bluntly) summed up in the opening essay, Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi's "Whose 1960s?," which addresses gender, resistance, and liberation in Palestine. Abdulhadi asserts that the narrative of the 1960s has been for too long a property right of "the U.S. white heterosexual male radicals (in particular, members of the Students for a Democratic Society)" (13). *New World Coming's* second and third premises flow from acceptance of this questionable social construction by insisting on shifting the gaze away from the United States, attending to a range of happenings elsewhere, and extending our view of the "long sixties" to include anti-colonial struggles of the 1950s (Algeria) through the 1980s (Nicaragua). Accenting resistance to colonialism, this edited collection frames the 1960s, as did Frederic Jameson some time ago, within an implicit paradigm of "Third Worldism," in spite of an illuminating epilogue by Chinese scholar Tina Mai Chen that rightly questions much that shores up such a perspective.

No one can possibly argue against extending the reach of our appreciation of the 1960s globally, although just how the decade shaped world consciousness requires more discussion and explanation than is present in this volume. Nor is there anything inherently wrong with striving to grasp the importance of continuities within history, making connections that have been obscured or ignored. This inevitably creates understandings of linkages across decades and through eras.

That said, if we are to understand the 1960s as anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggle (which of course was one large part of the decade's tumultuousness), then we can extend the origins of the 1960s back to the 19th century and earlier, and reach the Sixties forward to the present. For as long as there have been Empires (which, of course, still exist) there have been struggles against colonialism and imperialism.

My own view is that we need to situate the *rupture* that constituted the 1960s within an understanding of important *historical continuities*. This does not necessarily demand submerging the decade's uniqueness within a 'long' periodization that inevitably understates the peculiarities of the decade. I see no contradiction in recognizing *rupture* within *continuity*, just as I do not think such an approach valorizes what the editors and *some* authors present in this collection regard as a conventional accent on the nature of Sixties radicalizations.

What is perhaps most unique about the global consciousness of the 1960s was how youth in the advanced capitalist political economies co-joined their struggles against various oppressions with the fights against racism in their homelands and elsewhere, linking their politics of wide-ranging challenge to anti-colonial movements around the world. It was an anti-war decade that took various wars of position into almost all corners of everyday life. By the end of the 1960s, many Pandora's Boxes had been pried open, among the most important being those that would come to be associated with anti-capitalist workers' struggles, women's liberation, aboriginal militancy, and gay/lesbian activism. To suggest that attention to what was called in the 1960s "counterplanning on the shop floor," the Parisian events of May '68, the Prague Spring, or the New York City Columbia University occupation has somehow displaced attention to Palestine, Vietnam, Cuba, or China, and the events that unfolded there over the course of one of the 20th century's most raucous and rebellious decades, strikes me as odd. We need thought about, reflection on, and study of all such histories.

The point is that Ian McKay's interesting account of his High School radicalization in Sarnia in 1968 would have been, I think, unfathomable a decade earlier. The influential developments he cites – Paris burning, the Black Panther Party, the victories of the Viet Cong, magazines such as *Ramparts* or the widely-read book, *The Student as Nigger* – were simply not there in any meaningful sense in 1958. A fifteen-year old with McKay's inclinations in the 1950s would have been a rare bird. In the 1960s there were flocks of us.

A collection as rich and abundant as *New World Coming* is bound to foster disagreement about which of the 43 essays most effectively make their points. Even organizing these short papers into coherent sections must have been a challenge, for there is inevitably overlap among the four groupings of articles labeled Nation-Decolonization-Liberation; Cultural Citizenship; Mobilizing Bodies; and Legacies of the Sixties. But the very orchestration and ordering in these kinds of parts tells us much about the editors' perspectives.

In the opening section on Nation-Decolonization-Liberation, Canada is addressed by McKay and Gary Kinsman's account of the national security state's war on gays. There is, sadly, no discussion of Quebec's vibrant, and undeniably globally conscious, struggle for national liberation. Two essays on Black Power in the United States come close to canceling each other out. Van Gosse's unnecessarily polemical insistence that Black Power was *not* a break with

mainstream 'civil rights-ism' and indeed engaged the nation state by "moving into the master's house" (a process involving election of black mayors, the establishment of a Congressional Black Caucus, and the mobilization of the National Black Political Convention in 1972), contrasts with Dan Berger's discussion of the Republic of New Afrika movement. This militant voice of Black Power challenged that very master's house, demanding national liberation and reparations for the wrongs done to African Americans. Other essays chart chapters of the global 1960s in their attention to a range of topics, including the Soviet reaction to 1968, Latin American Maoism, and trade union-aboriginal relations around uranium mining in the southwestern United States.

Perhaps the core section of the book is the one designated Cultural Citizenship. It showcases the attraction to cultural struggle (and interpreting culture *as* struggle) that in fact animates the bulk of the contributions to this volume. Guatemalan poets, Cuban films, Japan's Olympiad, soul music in Dar es Salaam, Italian rock, Swedish rural theatre of revolt, Edinburgh festivals, Sao Paulo and Chicago slums, Canadian peacekeeping in the Congo, antiwar travel to Hanoi, and political posters are all the subject of mostly fascinating essays, some of which nonetheless seem distanced from any engagement with what can be meaningfully presented as "the global sixties."

At their best, these essays are suggestive of important tissues of inference, in which suggested connections need further elaborations. Is it likely, as Marilisa Merolla suggests, that the rock music of Italy's 1950s was, in its soft articulation of anguish, alienation, and abandonment, easily translated into "the generational crisis" of 1968? (195) Did the "reappropriation, reworking, and revaluing" of Negritude that accompanied the contested introduction of James Brown to Tanzania or the showcasing of African American artists in Senegal's First World Festival of Negro Arts create sites for "a dialogue about the possibility of creating a global blackness?" (178, 186) To answer such questions we need to interrogate not only the new spaces of inquiry evident in this volume, but the still obscured meanings of more conventional topics. We will need to examine not only Elvis in Rome, but Bob Dylan (surprisingly absent from this volume, he is mentioned, if my reading is thorough enough, by only one contributor, the former Young Lord and current New York City trade unionist Jaime Veve) in Greenwich Village and Newport. We will need to look more closely, not only at James Brown's "Please Please Please" (1959), but at Muhammad Ali's trickster rhymes and the strategic defences and demands of Robert Williams, Malcolm X, and Fred Hampton.

Sheila Rowbotham kicks off the third section of *New World Coming,* "Mobilizing Bodies," with an evocative memoir of 1968 as a springboard for women's liberation. Illuminating essays in this part of the book tend to address women, two of the best being Molly Geidel's discussion of gender, development and the United States Peace Corps and Lara Campbell's invaluable

reminder that women, too, left the United States in opposition to the Vietnam War, and that their contribution to the politics of the 1960s in Canada was decisive. Environmentalism figures in this section as well, with essays on scientists as a Sixties vanguard and Agent Orange and dioxin as chemicals whose destructiveness reached out of the decade into our own eras of ecological consciousness.

One of Canada's leading New Left figures, James Harding, takes this theme of environmentalism into the final section of *New World Coming*, contributing an important memoir of how the anti-nuclear origins of 1960s radicalization continued in the ecological movement of recent decades. Other commentators on the "legacies of the 1960s" of note include David Austin, Cary Fraser, and Jaime Veve.

Austin, who has written wonderfully on Black Caribbean-Canadians and the 1960s provides a decisively important essay on the little-known Montreal-based Caribbean Conference Committee and its embrace of the politics of C. L. R. James. The significance of the Cold War and the nuclear arms race of the 1960s is perhaps best illuminated in Cary Fraser's discussion of how nuclear policies unleashed a destructive colonialism from the Indian Ocean to Cuba.

Jaime Veve deserves, in my mind, to close this review. More than any other contributor to *New World Coming*, Veve sums up the unique character of the 1960s and translates the radicalization that constituted a decisive rupture into later and ongoing struggles. Like Suze Rotolo, whose recent memoir of Greenwich Village in the 1960s declared unequivocally that, "The sixties were an era that spoke a language of inquiry and curiosity and rebelliousness against the stifling and repressive political and social culture of the decade that preceded," Veve remembers "a time when a young generation with little historical connection to previous opposition movements or organizational frameworks took upon itself to present a defiant challenge to the status quo." (399) Almost alone among the contributors, most of whom see Barack Obama as promising something of the 1960s in our own times, Veve castigates the current Democratic President for speaking dismissively of the need to overcome the "psychodrama" of the 1960s (400). Veve lives with the Sixties still, not as a property right of a masculine 'American' left, but as a commitment to social transformation, *writ large*.

If the struggle for that end has changed somewhat, so too has it continued. Always global in its reach, the ethos of 1960s radicalism remains a provocation to the politics of conformity, a prod to the complacent acquisitive individualism of a consumer capitalism now obviously very long in its barred tooth, and a push to never settle for the lesser of any evils, but to demand the best that can be achieved (and more), so that the worst that is on offer can be thwarted.

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