

Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

With *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*, Bryan Palmer has made an impressive bid for authority in an area of historical inquiry that has, until fairly recently, remained sorely understudied in Canada. Weighing in at over 400 pages, the book covers most of the major issues of the decade without succumbing to the nostalgia of generational rebellion or that tired triad of “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll,” and it is therefore likely to displace Doug Owram’s somewhat dated effort as *the* text on Canada’s Sixties.

The book takes as its central theme “the ironies of identity”: the cracking of consensus around Canada’s sense of itself as a British colony, the struggle for national autonomy under the juggernaut of postwar American hegemony, and the multiple voices that challenged official understandings of ‘Canada’ during a particularly nationalist period. The deterioration of Canada’s national identity during this period has been dealt with before, and so Palmer’s argument does not seem all that groundbreaking. Despite dressing it up in the sexy garb of ‘irony’, at bottom *Canada's 1960s* is yet another discussion of Canadian national identity — a subject that has become such a scholarly obsession that one wonders if we are becoming trapped in a rather stale interpretive paradigm.

In light of this notion it is more helpful to read Palmer’s book as a historicisation of our obsession with national identity rather than as yet another projection of it. The rebellious decade saw challenges put to the unifying notion of Canada as a Northern outpost of the British Empire — challenges that fragmented our sense of national identity so totally that we have not yet recovered any viable alternative. Yet Palmer exhibits unease about *any* dominant notion of Canadian identity, and he closes his book on an appropriately ironic note, asking: “Is national identity really what we need?” (430).

Much like the decade itself, Palmer’s approach is at times rather fragmentary. He opens with a discussion of Canadian political economy and the dollar crisis of 1962, thus constructing the foundations of his work on a structural analysis of Canada’s economic situation. But the pace then shifts dramatically with several chapters that are largely narrative and biographical, where characters such as Diefenbaker, Munsinger, Trudeau and McLuhan become foils against which Palmer hones his discussion of identity. The latter parts of the book are better, as Palmer seems to hit his stride with discussions of how New Left student syndicalism, wildcat workers’ revolts, radical Québécois nationalism, and Red Power each challenged notions of Canadian identity in various ways.

His discussion of Quebec is particularly welcome, given that this is a subject often dealt with rather superficially by Anglophone scholars — although he would have benefitted from a deeper engagement with the existing francophone literature. Palmer’s analysis of Pierre Vallières’ *White Niggers of America* is

excellent, highlighting both the anti-capitalist critique *and* the text's indebtedness to black power politics and national liberation movements across the globe. Hopefully these efforts will go a long way towards revitalizing a book that Palmer rightly identifies as "arguably one of Canada's most quintessential New Left text[s]" (338). His discussion of Red Power is equally important, as the experiences of Native peoples remain *the* most understudied aspect of the decade.

Palmer's failure to grant the burgeoning feminist movement more attention than he does is rather disturbing. His discussion of women's consciousness-raising efforts directed against the masculine culture of the New Left occupies a scant ten pages, and his coverage of such important subjects as the Voice of Women is distressingly superficial. It is characteristic of the masculine perspective that haunts this book that the only woman discussed with any kind of depth is Gerda Munsinger, the sexy socialite who was treated as little more than a pretty appendage by her suitors.

The lack of attention to women's issues is troubling, but perhaps in the end is really a reflection of the overtly masculine character of 'the sixties' themselves, and the fact that Canadian women's experiences during this decade remain woefully under-represented in the literature. That said, Palmer would have done well to include a separate chapter on the feminist movement, as he does with the New Left, Québécois radicalism, and Red Power.

As with his other works, Palmer's ultimate message tends at times to become obscured by cumbersome prose and awkward analogies, and the theme of irony is, ironically, underdeveloped throughout the text. Despite these shortcomings, however, as a synthesis of existing works on Canada's 1960s and as an historicisation of our obsessions with national identity, Palmer's latest offering is a most welcome addition to a growing canon of Canadian Sixties lit.

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Sandra Rollings-Magnusson, *Heavy Burdens on Small Shoulders: The Labour of Pioneer Children on the Canadian Prairies* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009).

This is a useful little book, accessible to undergraduates in history, sociology, Canadian Studies, and other fields, while providing a handy addition to the libraries of scholars of child labour and family life. Its strength lies in its detailed confirmation of children's work as critical to family survival in the nineteenth and early twentieth century period of prairie farm settlement. Using diaries, letters, memoirs, autobiographies, and other first person accounts, historical sociologist Sandra Rollings-Magnusson draws on the evidence of 260 children, 97 girls and 132 boys, aged from three to their late teens, living in