

Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

Claude Jasmin's 1964 novel, *Éthel et le terroriste*, has its French Canadian narrator-protagonist yell out the following words in front of the United Nations Building in New York: "Vive Cuba! Vive l'Afrique! Vive le Québec libre! Vive le Québec libre!" Incendiary words for an incendiary novel. And prophetic as well: two years after the novel was published, real-life *Front de Libération du Québec* (FLQ) revolutionaries Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon were arrested in front of the United Nations Building in New York for protesting the colonial condition of French-speaking Quebecers, and for trying to bring international attention to their cause. If History has been less kind to Charles Gagnon – his role has been primarily relegated to playing Sancho Panza to Vallières' Don Quixote – Pierre Vallières, on the other hand, has come to embody the distinctive revolutionary turn taken by Quebec nationalism in the latter half of the 1960s, a reputation based in no small part on the fact that, still reeling from the ravages of a hunger strike, and while imprisoned at New York's Manhattan Detention House for Men, he penned perhaps the most important intellectual document of the Quebec revolutionary movement: *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*.

Part-intellectual autobiography, part-political manifesto, part-revolutionary call-to-arms, *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*, as its title (translated into English as *White Niggers of America*) more than abundantly makes clear, provided a stunning meditation on race, identity, and the (at times) slippery relationship between colonialism, Quebec's French Canadian population and other colonized peoples of the world. Vallières, of course, was far from alone in this; he was part of a whole generation of radicals who sought to infuse their nationalism with a potent dose of anti-colonial thought and revolutionary praxis. Quebec's connection to Third-World decolonization politics and discourses had been nurtured and developed in the province's more radical nationalist intellectual, artistic, and political circles to such an extent in the 1960s that, by decade's end, one no longer would have been shocked, or even mildly surprised, to see a placard, or hear a poem, referencing Quebec in the same breath as Algiers, or Havana, or Little Rock, Arkansas.

This is the world historian Sean Mills examines in his book, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal*. Based on his Bullen prize-winning doctoral dissertation, Mills' book, his first, analyses the impact of the ideas of decolonization, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism on Montreal radicals of the 1960s. Seeking, as he puts it, to "demonstrate the ways in which both theory and people travelled across the barriers separating various parts of the world" (7), Mills adroitly positions Quebec, and more specifically the political agitation that took place in the city of Montreal, at the center of a

broader narrative of 1960s global dissent and upheaval. In doing so, he builds upon a number of recent studies which examined the fruitful and, for some, confounding, relationship between Quebec nationalism and 1960s decolonization. What demarcates *The Empire Within* from the other studies of the subject, however, is its emphasis on Montreal and what Mills sees as an “alternative political movement” which emerged there and ran counter not only to the neo-nationalist project of modernisation embodied in the Quiet Revolution, but also chartered a different path from that of Quebec’s better known revolutionaries – the FLQ. Mills’ focus, he argues, is not on a “small group of isolated revolutionaries” (the FLQ), but rather on “a mass movement” of left-wing grass-roots activists – a vague and disparate bunch, seemingly uniting everyone from francophone radicals to black activists, feminists, and labour groups – which culminated in a wide-ranging 1972 labour strike that, in Mills’ analysis, supersedes the October Crisis as the great climactic event of 1960s Montreal activism.

And herein lies the book’s shortcoming: its neat, tidy approach to what in truth was a messy, baggy subject. For at least when it comes to the extremely complex and variegated subject of 1960s Quebec nationalism, Mills’ safe and uninspiring choice to adopt the relatively time-worn methodological lens of race, gender, and class, seems not only contrived, but perhaps somewhat naive, as well. Indeed, how united was this supposed mass movement of left-wing grass-roots activists that allegedly transgressed racial, linguistic, gender, and class lines in late 1960s Quebec? According to the evidence Mills presents in his book, the answer seems to be, not much. He cites evidence from a few scant interviews conducted, years after the fact, with a marginal left-wing activist or two (156) – or the unconvincing evidence that because a memo here, or a handbook there, was translated by a radical English language group into French this should lead us to believe that inter-ethnic, or rather inter-linguistic, cooperation between anglophone and francophone radicals actually existed (126). Moreover, Mills’ book suffers, at times, from his disconcerting tendency to introduce present-day value judgments into the narrative, such as his chastisement of radical French Canadian nationalists for having paid scant attention to the plight of Canada’s Native peoples in the early 1960s (a point that is debatable, as the voluminous writings of writer-doctor Jacques Ferron, for example, make abundantly clear), or the fact that the radical organizers of Opération McGill Français, as Mills so self-righteously puts it, “relied on gendered language that embedded new forms of exclusion.” (150)

When Mills relaxes the firm grip of his argument and takes a break from forcing History to fit his view, his book nonetheless presents a good account of aspects of Montreal radicalism in the riotous sixties. One is treated in the book to a number of revealing (and incontrovertibly important, in their own right) events in the history of Montreal, such as the Congress of Black Writers held at McGill in October of 1968, and the Riot at Sir George Williams Campus

the following year. And Mills is also sound in showing how the more radical members of Quebec's feminist movement drew from decolonization discourse and anti-colonial paradigms to elaborate their own critique of patriarchal norms and practices by decades' end. For those interested in brushing up on such aspects of Montreal radicalism in the decade of the 1960s, Mills' book is a good place to start.

Alexis Lachaine  
York University

**Martha Elizabeth Walls, *No Need of a Chief for This Band: The Maritime Mi'kmaq and Federal Electoral Legislation, 1899-1951* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).**

Using the Mi'kmaq as a case study, Martha Elizabeth Walls examines the creation and imposition of federal electoral legislation in maritime Canada between 1899 and 1951 and the various ways in which indigenous communities accepted, rejected, and deflected its assimilationist purpose. Indebted to colonial-era Indian policy in the Canadas – which also sought the “gradual civilization of the Indian tribes” – the 1899 amendments to the Indian Act aimed to replace indigenous forms of governance, in all their variety, with a standardized band council system. By electing their chiefs and councilors every three years under the auspices of a local Indian agent, Walls recounts, the federal government hoped to accomplish in the realm of politics what reserve life and aboriginal schools sought in the areas of economics and culture: the elimination of the Indian as an Indian.

It did not quite work out that way. While the new “triennial” system enhanced the influence of superintendents and local Indian agents over local political affairs – it was now possible for them to unilaterally depose an elected chief – the Mi'kmaq themselves never fully succumbed to the letter or intent of the new laws. Instead, as Walls demonstrates, a form of “political syncretism” evolved on Mi'kmaw reserves, as communities across the region combined existing forms of indigenous governance (which in themselves had evolved over centuries of encounter with Europeans) with elements of the new federal system to defend and often expand the scope of their own autonomy. In the end, this resistance, coupled with the absence of essential state resources (both financial and human) to properly administer the new electoral legislation, not only undermined the law's assimilationist objectives, but acted as a catalyst for contemporary struggles for indigenous rights.

Developed over five tightly focused chapters, Walls's argument is persuasive in many ways. To her immense credit, she situates her analysis of twentieth-century Mi'kmaw politics in the deeper history of native-newcomer encoun-