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Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Pp. xi + 605; illus. CDN\$85 (cloth). ISBN: 9780802099549.

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In *Canada's 1960s*, Bryan Palmer provides a fascinating analysis of a key but little-examined decade. Those readers anticipating a comprehensive history of the 1960s in Canada, however, will likely be disappointed. While Palmer offers up much on the history of the period, he focuses on particularly poignant case studies as well as the more radical activities of the decade. He does not present, nor is it his intent to present, the decade à la Halberstam's *The Fifties* or Marwick's *The Sixties*. Rather, as the back cover indicates, Palmer's is an interpretative history — and a powerful one at that.

Palmer argues that the 1960s represented a challenge to the form of Canadian national identity — that of a British settler society — that dominated public discourse until that time. The decade marked the demise of that identity. However, current uncertainties regarding Canadian identity are, for Palmer, related to an unfinished program, the inability of the 1960s to give birth to a new society. As a result, Palmer argues, "The irony of Canadian identity in the 1960s was that as the old attachment to British Canada was finally and decisively shed, it was replaced only with uncertainty" (5). Ultimately Palmer concludes that the meaning of the 1960s remains with us, pushing us to demand of ourselves, "Is national identity really what we need?" (430).

The path to that question leads us through some fascinating case studies. Palmer's telling of the Gerda Munsinger story and the history around the Chualo-Ali fight offers compelling, almost voyeuristic, entries into a society both rooted in British and patriarchal ideals and beginning to undergo change. For Palmer, the Munsinger story illustrates both a staid Victorianism and points forward to new forms of sexual politics. Chualo represents the emergence of a "new Canada" where new Canadians destabilized a British Anglophone iconography, though as part of an expansion of whiteness rather than a defeat of racial prejudice.

According to Palmer, these moments, and others, hint at underlying challenges to an Old Canada which would be pummeled by an emerging counterculture, the student New Left, wildcat strikes, Quebec nationalism, and Red Power. These different groups — students, strikers, separatists, Aboriginal activists — mounted significant, although different, challenges to the state. The failing of the various 1960s movements is that by and large they remained separate forms of protest. In the end, Palmer argues, "The great irony of the Sixties was thus that while it decisively declared the end of one Canada, it defeated, for a generation or more, the possibility of realizing a new national identity that so much of the decade seemed to both demand and promote" (429).

Palmer's book raises many questions, but I want to focus on two. The first is Palmer's periodization, and thus interpretation, of the 1960s. The debate over the timing and emergence of the 1960s is growing, particularly in the international context. Palmer focuses on the 1960s as decade and sees particularly the

latter part of it as a period of rupture. Diverse groups, though marked by their youth, appear from the mid-1960s on to challenge the status quo. Yet some historians have questioned the emphasis on rupture, emphasizing much greater continuity both across time and among generations within the decade.

One wonders how long-term trends play into the ferment of the 1960s. To give just one example, Palmer emphasizes how the Gerda Munsinger affair may have opened up greater public discourse on sexuality, allowing a thaw in the sexual repression of the era. Yet one wonders whether the declining fertility rate over the course of the twentieth century, the movement of women, particularly married women, into the workforce, and women's gradual political and economic gains, did not have deeper significance than the public discourse of sexuality around the Munsinger affair. Equally, Marwick has put forward a powerful argument that in the Sixties, the small movements became mass ones, not due to the radical activities of a few but as a result of broad-based mass participation. For good reason, Palmer focuses on the rise of a number of radical groups or radical elements within larger social groups. How did the challenges from small groups of Canadians become a much broader challenge to existing Canadian society?

The second important questions that comes to mind is Palmer's take on "Old Canada" — an identity built on the idea of Canada as a British settler society. He argues that "Canada was presented as peopled by a sturdy loyalist stock, attached to empire and its greatness, rooted in a northern environment of orderly advance and routinized progress" (15). That definition seems almost to be a straw man. This is not to disagree with the notion that the idea of "Old Canada" loomed large in public discourse or that real political and economic power was held by those of British descent. It is posited, however, without any sense that the meaning of "Britishness" might itself have been changing over time. Was the idea of a British settler society the same at Confederation, the 1880s, the 1930s, the 1950s?

One key element of this British identity, one might argue, is Protestantism — something largely ignored by Palmer. A now significant literature points to the difficult rearticulation of Protestantism in the first half of the twentieth century — its fracturing from a broad evangelicalism in the nineteenth century to a variety of voices, one of which was a more liberal wing. The latter incorporated new liberal understandings of the state — which would help transform ideas about the responsibility of the state to the individual — as well as an international outlook and growing attention to inter-faith co-operation that allowed growing acceptance of different cultures and faiths. It is possible, then, that prior to the 1960s, the idea of "Old Canada" was changing, and though perhaps more subtly, under challenge internally.

In the end, this is a stimulating and engaging book. It is both provocative and insightful. Palmer makes a strong argument regarding Canadian identity that historians of the next few decades will likely spend much time either elaborating upon or refuting. And it most certainly should prompt much new and welcome research on a period that fundamentally re-shaped Canadian identity and lives.