

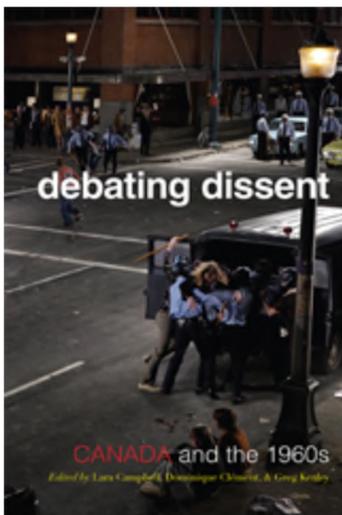
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Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties by Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément and Gregory Kealey (eds)

Reviewed by Nancy Janovicek



Generation has dominated sixties scholarship since the baby-boomers came of age in the 1960s. Early historical scholarship, often written by those who participated in the events, emphasized a rupture with the past. These writers focused on the legacies of “the sixties generation” and sought to explain why their own political aspirations had failed. Recent studies stress continuity with the 1950s and the 1970s. They question the cohesiveness of this generation and the prominence of generational conflict. *Debating Dissent* follows these themes, and makes important contributions to the scholarship that seeks to understand the complexities and contradictions of the period.

This collection has two objectives. First, the editors seek to examine Canadian experiences through a global perspective and to understand Canadian contributions to international developments. The transnational approach is, for the most part, limited to a North American perspective. The editors’ second objective is to propose a new framework for understanding the 1960s that rejects decadal exceptionalism. The contributors adopt the influential idea of “the long sixties,” a narrative that rejects “the stereotype of a quiescent 1950s or

a co-opted 1970s” (18). This declension narrative, the editors warn us, “locate[s] authentic political engagement or activism within movements dominated by white, generally male, middle-class university students” (20). The range of topics covered in this collection illustrate that focusing on this elite group ignores the many stories that must be told before we can begin to make sense of the social, political, and cultural transformations that took place in the 1960s.

The book is divided into five parts: Drugs, Health, and the Environment; Higher Education; Authority and Social Protest; Race and Working-Class Movements; and Nationalism and the State. All of the contributors tell a compelling story, and offer fresh insights on key events associated with the decade: the health food craze; psychedelic drugs; university protest; confrontations between police and activists; and the influence of the Black and Red Power movements in Canada. The essays in the final section turn our attention to changes in government bureaucracy, a topic too often overlooked in sixties narratives. The authors pay careful attention to connections between the politics of the 1950s and the 1960s, but tend to associate youth with radicalism and older people with conservatism. The chapters about student activism insist that it was necessarily radical, but there is limited examination of youth working within conservative organizations. Nevertheless, by drawing our attention to intergenerational collaboration, *Debating Dissent* lays the foundation for a critical examination of differences within generations.

Scholars who are interested in nuanced analysis of social change in the late twentieth century should read *Debating Dissent*. Students and a broader non-academic audience will enjoy these histories, too.

[*Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties*](#)

Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey, editors
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 384 pp, \$29.95 paper

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