“We Were Not Playing Games”: Transnational Moral Policing in 1970s Vancouver

by

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Declaration of Committee

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Abstract

At the conclusion of the Gastown Riot in August 1971, Vancouver Police Inspector Robert Abercrombie declared the evening “a good night’s work.” Using riot sticks and horse hooves, Vancouver Police violently dispersed a protest against marijuana laws in Gastown’s Maple Tree Square. The Gastown Riot, and the year of protests leading up to it, demonstrate a transnational relationship between police and protestors. City officials and constabulary organizations worked to preserve their vision of moral order during the 1960s and 1970s, buttressed by the slogan “law and order.” This thesis uses a comparative approach to analyze the contexts in which North American police organizations violently responded to protest under the pretence of protecting morality and law and order. Contributing to the historiography of Canadian policing, this study adds to the growing scholarship that illustrates the similar violent histories of Canada and the United States.

Keywords: Vancouver; Transnational; Hippie; Counterculture; Police Riot; Law and Order

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Introduction

Once the smoke cleared, Inspector Robert Abercrombie self-confidently explained to an inquest board that "We were not playing games." On a warm night in August 1971, a crowd of "long-haired youths" gathered in a downtown square to protest laws prohibiting the consumption of marijuana. The peaceful affair, fueled by free ice cream sandwiches and featuring music and dancing, began with individuals symbolically lighting pipes and joints. But then friends of the organizers climbed to a patio on the Europe Hotel and dropped their pants. The crowd cheered. Abercrombie did not. This was not decent "the way [he] liked decency," but a signal to act. On his orders a V-shaped formation of mounted officers rode into the square, and plainclothes policemen already milling in the crowd began to hit and drag hippies to custody wagons. Chaos erupted. Some demonstrators threw improvised projectiles at baton-swinging officers. Unwitting bystanders, merely exiting storefronts, were injured by riot sticks and horse-hooves. Many fled the violence, seeking shelter in cafes among bewildered diners, totally unaware of the melee outside. A few hours and seventy-nine arrests later, the "riot" was quelled. Looking back later, Abercrombie declared the evening "a good night's work."[1]

Episodes of urban violence were a ubiquitous feature of American life in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they became a focal point of conservative criticism of liberalism. Violent responses such as Abercrombie's, encapsulated in the phrase "law and order," helped to propel Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, and George Wallace to political prominence. One merely had to mention places such as Watts, Berkeley, Madison, Detroit, and Chicago to convey broadly-held beliefs that hippies threatened the fabric of civilized culture. As historian Michael Flamm notes, the Republican Party rode this wave of conservative angst to power, and constabularies made "law and order" a pretext to forcefully repress civil disobedience in what came to be called "police riots." Street crime, urban riots, and student protest exemplified a crisis of authority that seemed to threaten the heart of America. But the 7 August 1971 "riot" occurred not in the

[1] "Undue force was not used, inquiry told," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 30 September 1971; Kevin Griffin, "30 years ago, a pot smoke-in sparked the Gastown Riot: The Hippie counterculture clashed with a straight establishment that tried to crack down on soft drugs," *Vancouver Sun*, 7 August 2001.

U.S. but in Maple Tree Square in Vancouver. Moreover, the Gastown Riot was but one of many violent encounters in the Lower Mainland during the period, all of which challenge what Scott See has called the Canadian myth of "the peaceable kingdom."[2]

The countercultural impulses of the hippie movement are one of the defining features of the 1960s and 1970s. Moments such as the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and protests at Kent State, Jackson State, and Berkeley shaped both protesters and police. While civil disobedience was not as marked in Canadian culture, political and cultural dissent did occur and were, as historian Ian McKay argues, both derivative of American movements and distinctively Canadian. Thus, understanding policing, counterculture, and violence in its British Columbian context requires a transnational approach, one that takes seriously the flows of ideas and people across socially constructed borders that people at the time often transgressed.[3]

In 1968 Chicago, the Youth International Party (Yippie) organized a protest in response to the Democratic National Convention. Emphasizing political messages and emotional language to motivate the masses, organizers adopted non-violent action as a means of "[drawing] people into the movement." Chaos nevertheless erupted in a series of street battles between the Chicago police and protestors that eventually required the

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[2] Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 73; Scott W. See, "Nineteenth-Century Collective Violence: Toward a North American Context," *Labour* 39 (Spring 1997), 2.

[3] Group violence casts light on the social, political, and economic insecurities of the moment. However subtle or spectacular, violence always contains purpose and meaning, particularly when it is collective and organized. Richard Maxwell Brown's work on American violence also illuminates Canadian violence when he writes that "much American violence has been devoted to preserving the status quo" (Richard M. Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* New York: Oxford University Press, 1975, ii-iv) Brown's work, grounded in colonial and American contexts, nevertheless reveals the reflexively conservative justifications of violence. Scott See has implored Canadian historians to adopt a similarly comparative research approach, examining the cultural, economic, denominational, and political contexts that shaped episodes of violence across North America. Although the scale of violence differed in telling ways, Canada's violent past is undeniable, and it was sometimes remarkably synonymous with American episodes of crime, riot, and police violence. Examples include James Pitsula's *Keeping Canada British* (James Pitsula, *Keeping Canada British: The Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Saskatchewan*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013) which details the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in 1920's Saskatchewan, Peter Ward's *White Canada Forever* (Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979) examines racialized attitudes towards Asians, and See's *Riots in New Brunswick* (Scott W. See, *Riots in New Brunswick: Orange Nativism and Social Violence in the 1840s*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), on social violence in New Brunswick. These scholarly works demonstrate the social and cultural foundations of conservative forms of Canadian violence.

National Guard to restore order with bayonets and shotguns. These conflicts, which the Chicago police perceived as a turf war, had the effect of reinscribing a conservative, martial order in Chicago. Mayor Richard J. Daley promised, “as long as I am Mayor of this city, there will be law and order in the streets.” The Mayor and police department viewed force as a necessary means to suppress the “spoiled” youth. From their perspective, no one who loved their country, city, and community would publicly challenge its institutions. Protest was axiomatically treason, and conservative responses would only grow more forceful.[4]

In May 1970, the Ohio National Guard fired into a crowd of student protesters on the campus of Kent State University. The protest was in response to an expansion of the Vietnam War, and four students became victims of law-and-order politics. Like Daley, Nixon, and Reagan, Ohio’s Governor James A. Rhodes viewed Kent State as an opportunity to demonstrate his conservative bonafides, vowing to keep the campus open “at all costs” against “outside agitators” who had invaded an otherwise sober and respectful Ohio. Campus hippies were not real Americans. Like the Yippies at the Democratic National Convention, they lacked national pride and soiled city and country. Rhodes had ordered the National Guard to disperse the protest. Instead, the poorly coordinated troops fired randomly into a line of students. One infantryman called the incident a “car wreck.” Soldiers reacted instinctively to the sounds of gunfire, pulling triggers in a nightmarish chain reaction. Afterwards, an officer consoled the noticeably shaken infantrymen, “you did what you had to do.” Eleven days later more police violence erupted at Mississippi’s Jackson State University, when a white police force gunned down African American students protesting the deaths at Kent State. Similar to events in Ohio, a tense standoff between police and protestors exploded when a smashed bottle startled police into firing “from hip and from shoulder, emptying their guns into the crowd, the dorm windows above, and the darkness about them.” There was a pattern to all this. As in Chicago and Kent, Jackson’s police were on edge

[4] David R. Farber, *Chicago ’68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 84, 193; Frank Kusch, *Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic National Convention* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1, 55.

because protestors had not backed down. Frightened by projectile rocks and glass and fearing a loss of control, the police escalated their force to reassert control.[5]

Law-and-order rhetoric and escalating force drove the politics and policing of Vancouver as well. Although not as deadly, Canadian police action drew inspiration from the authoritative responses of its southern neighbour. Feeling a need to maintain authority and decency, Vancouver politicians and police drew their own lines in the sand. Drug use, sexuality, and immorality were existential threats to civilization. Neighborhoods such as Gastown were battlegrounds over diverging views about civility and civilization. That the battles unfolded on the lower east side also mattered. During the preceding decade Gastown had become an emblem of urban decline. Once the heart of the city, it had slid into disrepair and a haven for "skid row derelicts." conservative values regarding sex, drugs, and politics were openly flaunted, and John R. Fisk, Vancouver's Chief Constable in the early 1970s, attributed this abuse to "hippy types."[6]

Drug use was the most conspicuous way law and order policing blurred into moral politics. On 7 June 1971, Richard Nixon declared that "America's public enemy number one . . . is drug abuse. In order to fight and defeat this enemy, it is necessary to wage a new, all-out defensive." Nixon's War on Drugs led directly to America's highly racialized "carceral state," yet Canadians shared in this moral panic and war. This obsession with drugs dated at least to opioids in the 1920s; by the 1960s policing had fixated on marijuana and its links to the hippie and counterculture movements. Race was a compounding factor in the United States, and African Americans were incarcerated at inordinately high rates. Canadian enforcement was less racialized, more narrowly focused on long-haired youth. Militaristic rhetoric and a "hard" stance on drugs guided American policing. Similarly, Canada's federal Minister of Health tied pot use to "youth alienation across the country." Demands to legalize weed only reinforced the view of a debased, immoral youth threatening good society. An opinion poll in April 1970 revealed 77 percent of Canadians opposed the removal of criminal sanctions from marijuana;

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[5] Thomas M. Grace, *Kent State: Death and Dissent in the Long Sixties* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 209, 225, 230; Tim Spofford, *Lynch Street: The May 1970 Slayings at Jackson State College* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1988), 72.

[6] Vancouver Police Department, *1970 Annual Report* (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Police Department, 1970), 2, PDS 25, Box 152-B-05, City Publications Fonds, City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver, Canada.

opposition was even broader within the law enforcement community. The RCMP in Toronto and Vancouver responded with crackdowns. Under the Canadian Narcotic Control Act of 1961, possession convictions could warrant seven years in prison. In many ways Canadian law enforcement had already aligned with American conservativism, especially regarding marijuana as a "gateway drug." Law enforcement across the continent had adopted the philosophy of fast and hard enforcement to prevent worse outcomes. In 1969, changes to the act were made to decrease the punishment for possession to fines. Despite this, Canadian police continued to target soft-drug users and hippies with the same fervor. Events such as the Gastown riot were therefore not merely social clashes between police and "hippies" but cultural contests over the very meaning of order. In this respect, protests such as Kent State and Jackson State, though not directly related to drug use, nevertheless represented a collision between alienated youth and arbiters of moral order.[7]

It was also a racialized and gendered conflict. The history of policing in Canada is largely a tale of white guys and white-guy concerns. Until 1974, the RCMP was an exclusively male bastion, peopled mostly by officers of British and Irish heritage. Recruiting and training prioritized male physicality. Well into the 1960s, the RCMP still hired men with an eighth grade education. High school diplomas were not required until the 1970s. Historian Christabelle Sethna notes that the RCMP sought recruits who were "unlikely to ask questions or challenge authority and who could be taught military style discipline while imbibing the Mountie mystique . . . [of] white, physical masculinity." The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) paralleled the RCMP, preferring especially those imbued with conservative Catholic backgrounds. All this reinforced the North American constabulary's self perception as moral enforcers, the last line of defense in a degrading world. Recollecting Chicago in the 1960s, Officer Warren MacAulay remarked that "we liked what we had. We would have done anything to protect that; we were no different than anyone else." Fearing a loss of traditional values, and anxious of changing social

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[7] Howard Rahtz, *Race, Riots, and the Police* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2016), 83, 90; Michael Boudreau, "'The Struggle for a Different World': The 1971 Gastown Riot in Vancouver," *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Canadian Social History Series, 2012), 117-18. For carceral state see Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012); and James Forman Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

orders, the RCMP stoked fears of the emerging youth counterculture movement. As in the U.S., the Canadian war on drugs required an enemy, so following the lead of the FBI, the RCMP expanded its definition of "subversive groups" to include student-agitators, communist groups, and feminist organizations. Hippies and others were targeted because they challenged social conventions. In the U.S. that enemy was urban African Americans, the counterculture youth, and antiwar demonstrators. In Canada, the RCMP and VPD foregrounded hippies.[8]

The militarization of the constabulary was a crucial factor in the war on drugs. North American police forces had been increasingly militarized since the 1940s. Departments sought and received increased funding from cities to purchase heavier weapons and armour. Riot squads became increasingly common responses to protests. Heavier weaponry was the physical retort to crowds. American police also deployed riot gear as a symbol of suppression of Blacks. In Jackson, Mississippi, police showed up to protests armed for conflict. At Jackson State, they responded to reports of demonstrations with "guns, clubs, tear gas . . . and attack dogs." Armoured vans with bulletproof glass, gun ports, tear gas, and searchlights were common sights. Jackson's van was nicknamed "Thompson's Tank" in honor of the white mayor. In Chicago, clubs and tear gas preserved order. In response to civil unrest in the previous decades, officers took required courses and seminars in non-violent training, but the lessons were largely ignored. One Chicago task force veteran remarked, "if the fight starts, don't expect it to last long. We'll win in the first round."[9]

Constabulary forces in Vancouver and other Canadian cities did not militarize to the same degree as the Americans, at least in terms of technology, but growing budgets and storerooms demonstrate similar trends. Vancouver's police salary budget rose from $7,755,714 to $9,370,564 just between 1970 and 1971. New equipment accounted for more than $250,000 of the annual budget. This was a fraction of the inflation in urban American departments. By 1965, just prior to the federal War on Crime, Chicago doubled its number of sworn officers since 1945. The department accounted for nearly

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[8] Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt, *Just Watch Us: RCMP Surveillance of the Women's Liberation Movement in Cold War Canada* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2018), 22, 25, 26; Kusch, *Battleground Chicago*, 12; Marcel Martel, "They Smell Bad, Have Diseases, and Are Lazy: RCMP officers Reporting on Hippies in the Late Sixties," *Canadian Historical Review* 90/2 (2009), 217-18, 223.

[9] Spofford, *Lynch Street*, 8, 12; Farber, *Chicago '68*, 135.

25 percent of the city budget. Vancouver's budget, by contrast, spent only 13 percent on policing in 1970. Spending differences reflected several factors. The metropolitan populations were vastly different. According to the VPD's 1970 annual report, greater Vancouver area totaled 1,012,000 people; Chicago was triple that size. The presence of RCMP forces in surrounding townships also limited the scope and budget of the VPD. Conversely, the VPD's budget grew at a rate similar to Chicago, nearly doubling from 1959 to 1970. What was the VPD buying? Archival records are not as detailed as a historian would wish, but a tactical guidelines manual from 1975-1976 lists submachine guns, shotguns, rifles, tear gas, and flares. Although not as menacing as "Thompson's Tank," the VPD arsenal was beyond adequate to deal with a street commotion. Militarization in this context does not explicitly mean an increase in deadly equipment, but also tactics in which to gather information on possible subversive groups. In combination, the increased use of military-style equipment and intelligence gathering tactics increase the ways in which constabulary organizations emulate the military in their operations. The equipment being used in Vancouver was not as militaristic as what was appearing throughout the United States during this period, but when taken into context with RCMP intelligence operations, an increase in the overall militarization of Canadian organizations becomes more apparent.[10]

Policing philosophy was as important to the outbreak of violence as recruitment and equipment. Sociological studies of police attitudes towards crowds reveal dangerous elements in the training of officers and handling of crowds. Sociologist David Schweingruber has examined the roots of mob sociology in police literature. Early police writings assumed that every crowd had the potential for violence and transformation into an angry mob. This inherent danger was accepted as common sense and disseminated through police manuals. As a result policing stressed the need to control crowds through force, but, as Schweingruber noted this produced a self-fulfilling prophecy. Physical force prompted physical responses. Peaceful protests turned violent. As crowds shift

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[10] Vancouver Police Department, *1971 Annual Report* (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Police Department, 1971), PDS 25, Box 152-B-05, City Publications Fonds, City of Vancouver Archives; Vancouver Police Department, *1970 Annual Report*; Vancouver Police Department, *Tactical Guidelines* (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Police Department, 1975), F3-S20-I10, Box 36-5, Vancouver Police Department Fonds, Vancouver Police Museum & Archives, Vancouver, B.C., Canada; Simon Balto, *Occupied Territory: Policing Black Chicago from Red Summer to Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 134; Greg Marquis, *The Vigilant Eye: Policing Canada from 1867 to 9/11* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2016), 160.

from peaceful to agitated, the police sensed a loss of control, lines of communication broke down, and physical force became the default response. Perceived losses of control usually led to unnecessary escalations as mob-like mentalities spread amongst threatened officers.[11]

The language used to describe violence offers insights into the mentality of officers prior to violence. From a sociological perspective, the fear of losing control raises tensions that make it easier to validate violence as a response. Sociologist Anne Nassauer describes this as *the loss of control pathway*, in which multiple factors combine to create a sense of fear. Nassauer notes that officers respond violently when their authority is threatened. Studies show that police are "deeply concerned" with presenting themselves as being in control. Any challenge to their legal and even moral authority can trigger the loss of control pathway, but the greatest threats are spatial incursions and mismanagement. When protestors infringe upon a policing space, regardless of intent, officer anxieties heighten. Without a clear plan, the incursion itself can trigger violence, even when responses among individual officers or protesters vary. Training also influences officer responses, especially in raising the likelihood of mismanagement. Merging Nassauer's insights about loss of control pathway with Schweingruber's study of police literature clarifies a policing culture feedback loop. When police use physical force to control a dangerous crowd, they themselves can breach spatial separations, but that usually only leads to further escalation of violence that overdetermines the dangerous character of the crowd.[12]

These insights are crucial for understanding how North American policing sociology responded in the 1970s to disturbances during in the 1960s. The Kerner Commission on Civil Disorder and the Eisenhower Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence both criticized features of the escalated force model, encouraging a shift away from confrontation to management in U.S. policing, and Canadian police organizations attempted a similar shift. In its 1971 annual report, the VPD acknowledged that change was needed, noting that "as a result of our experience during the past

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[11] David Schweingruber, "Mob Sociology and Escalated Force: Sociology's Contribution to Repressive Police Tactics," *The Sociological Quarterly* 41 (June 2000), 376, 383.

[12] Anne Nassauer, "Forward Panic and Police Riots," in *Framing Excessive Violence: Discourse and Dynamics*, ed. Daniel Zeigler, Marco Gerster, and Steffen Krämer (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 37, 44.

several years in relation to the policing of demonstrations, a number of changes have been made in our philosophy with respect to the role of the police in crowd control situations." Despite such statements, the "dangerous crowd" rhetoric continued to permeate constabulary organizations and policing literature.[13]

In many ways, Vancouver was as representative of the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s as cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. The youth and counterculture movements who fought for change were met by police enforcing conservative visions of the good society. The VPD, influenced in part by continental themes of policing, responded to dissent in ways similar to their American counterparts. Policing, protest, and local politics were influenced by transnational fears of moral breakdown. As moral panic spread, police and politicians angrily defended their vision of what society should look like. Protecting order and traditional morality, Canadian police bastioned themselves as the last line of defense against more than crime. They became the heavy hand of law and order.

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[13] Schweingruber, "Mob Sociology and Escalated Force," 330; Vancouver Police Department, *1971 Annual Report*.

Chapter 1. The Co-Production of Policing and Protest: Hippies, Love Street, and "Grasstown"

Battles over the scope of North American policing have embroiled the public, policy makers, and police organizations since the late nineteenth century. The more that violence was used to suppress perceived threats to the political and cultural status quo, the louder the demands for change. This has been especially true of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which has long been Canada's fist inside the white glove. First tasked with patrolling the periphery of the nation state, by the inter-war period the RCMP had evolved into a municipal policing organization and in danger of being disbanded. Needing a cause to champion itself, the agency went after threats such as the left, "hated and evil Asiatics," and opium. By refocusing on "external menaces," the RCMP solidified its role as Canada's guardian by the end of the 1920s. Its battles against drugs have flared repeatedly during moral and legal crises in the last century.[1] Like the United States, Canada chose to moralize and criminalize drug usage, rather than to treat it as a health issue, and a transnational dialogue unfolded between the RCMP and the American Narcotics Division on smuggling and pricing. Canadians and Americans took similar approaches to policing drugs, including listing marijuana as an illegal narcotic. From the interwar period on, the management and motivations of drug policing in Canada and the U.S. enforced a moral order that was classed and racialized.

This background is necessary to understand why postwar reshaping of North American urban landscapes posed such consternation and elicited so many violent episodes by policing organizations on both sides of the border during the 1960s and 1970s. Drugs and countercultural movements were key threats to conservative morals. In Toronto, Vancouver, New York, and Los Angeles, policing organizations linked drugs and political radicalism in an effort to criminalize hippies.[2] Countercultural and hippie movements—never fully synonymous—responded by organizing sit-ins and other forms of disobedience to protest their treatment, but each act of resistance only further

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[1] Steve Hewitt, "'While Unpleasant It Is a Service to Humanity': The RCMP's War on Drugs in the Interwar Period," *Journal of Canadian Studies* no. 2 (2004), 80, 84, 100.

[2] Erika Dyck, "The Pyschedelic Sixties in North America: Drugs and Identity," *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Canadian Social History Series, 2012), 59.

angered law enforcement and government officials. The criminalization and targeting of the countercultural and hippie movements created a cycle of co-production between law enforcement and hippies.

These tensions were a central component of "Sixties" culture. Composed mostly of baby-boomers, long-haired "hippies" became a conspicuous presence in Vancouver, Toronto, San Francisco, and other major North American cities. Molded by the unrivaled economic bounty during their youth, baby-boomers experienced greater financial, social, and educational opportunities than any previous or ensuing generation. Their opportunities and large numbers enabled Boomers to disrupt existing economic and cultural patterns. Clashes between adults and youths grew increasingly tense during the decade for intricate reasons. First, by 1965 half the population of North America was under the age of twenty-five, and the imbalance was growing.[3] Boomers' sheer numbers as well as their behavior seemed threatening to older folk. Moreover, they were the most self-conscious generation yet. Broadcast technologies made it far easier to disseminate information, and popular culture had become an effective medium to share values.

Equally important was the growing crisis within established institutions. A key reason why youths were creating their own forms of respectability was the fall of adult respectability. The death of President John F. Kennedy, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War worked to erode trust in authority figures. Clothes, hair, music, and other forms of pop culture were not just youth fashion but symbols of political dissent, even if not wholly original. Previous countercultural impulses had also shaped the hippie movement and its rebellious symbology. "Folk" and "beat" cultures of the 1950s provided the foundation for Boomer counterculture. Existing artistic communities in Canada's largest cities transitioned into proprietors, building space for the hippie movement to mingle and grow. Vancouver's warm climate drew youth to the city, and Gastown, Granville Street, and Kitsilano quickly emerged as centers of activity.[4] Record stores, cafes, marijuana dispensaries, and yoga enthusiasts staked out space in these neighbourhoods, and their growing presence quickly elicited reactions. Restaurants, businesses, and public spaces

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[3] Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (University of Toronto Press, 1996), 187, 192.

[4] *Ibid.*, 187, 189, 192.

became moral and political battlegrounds as young and old contested lifestyles in cities that they collectively loved in diverging ways.

The counterculture's true power was in its politicization of the non-political. Beginning with style, language, and drugs, politicized youth transformed non-political youth into activists. The mysticism of 1960s radicalism would not have been possible if politics, activism, and rebellion had been reserved only for true radicals. The era's idealism, wrapped up as it was in lifestyle choices, made causes communal. Generational identity was sufficiently forceful to draw support from many seemingly non-activist youths in challenges to adult credibility. Generational identification was key because few youths were actually fully committed hippies; while many students adorned themselves in hippie attire, only a tiny fraction were radicals. By blurring the line between devout hippie and occasional participant, counterculture encompassed a far broader swath of North American youths. One commonality was education. Since elementary school, the Boom generation's sheer numbers altered public education systems. Schools and classrooms were built at a frantic pace to keep up with the postwar spike in births, and teachers had to be trained and hired in unrivaled numbers. The curriculum also changed. The entire system was rescaled to accommodate the huge demographic bubble. Child-centredness was the foundation of the new approach, and self-worth, experience, and anti-authoritarianism were the products.[5] Growing up in these conditions, Boomers were catered to like no previous generation, and like no generation in history they were primed for rebellion.

Although the terminology of the hippie movement varied by place and time, historian William Rorabaugh notes that drugs, music, and spirituality were through threads of the hippie movement. In San Francisco, which was a countercultural hotbed in the 1960s, college dropouts congregated to enjoy music, sex, and drugs. Most were in their early twenties; spontaneity and rebellion against cultural norms were the guiding principles. Almost all were white. Too high to work, they shared rent, food, drugs, and each other. Packed into group homes, they slept on mattresses on the floor and relied on each other for everything wherever they settled next. Drug use was rampant, and LSD and marijuana were the main lubricants of this lifestyle, both as means to highs and to rebellion. In San Francisco, seemingly everything in the Haight-Ashbury district had a

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[5] *Ibid.*, 111, 135, 215, 217.

drug connection. From hash pipes and hookahs to music, art, clothing, and spiritual texts, the connection between drug use and music cannot be overstated in the hippie movement.[6]

The key to the total drug experience was music. Profoundly distorting and heightening all senses, LSD became the drug of choice to slow time and experience every moment. Incense, food, and beverages heightened sensual experiences. Warm bodies could elevate one's sense of touch. Music was a way to experience sound; its rhythms could be enhanced through the integration of light and film. Emerging as a new drug, it only made sense that LSD required new music to be experienced properly. The repetitive vocal lines and mellow guitar tones of previous music eras did not suit the drug. The psychedelic, reality-altering qualities of LSD instead inspired improvisation, intertwining melodies, and teased out contrasts between tension-building and -relieving sections. The new sound gained a name: Acid Rock, or the San Francisco Sound.[7]

If LSD was the ne plus ultra chemical experience of the countercultural sixties, marijuana was the foundational drug, indulged in much more frequently both due to availability and cost. The high lasted only a short time compared to day-long acid trips, but the short buzz was also more convenient. Both substances tended to slow time, enhance senses, and distort reality. What marijuana lacked, though, was LSD's potential to trigger wild visions. Still, one study found that of eighty hippies surveyed, only one had not used marijuana daily. This signaled a generational departure. Drugs were a means to intoxication and rejection of the adult culture of alcohol. Drugs expressed youthful distinction. Hippies were proud to "love more, fuck more, [and] take more drugs," and this held not just for San Francisco but across North America.[8]

The loudest members—the political organizers, agitators, and proprietors—had clear agendas, but most of the youth movement were more scattered, preoccupied, and ambivalent. Thus it was difficult for law enforcement agencies to distinguish between true rebels and young individuals caught up in a trend. John Fisk, Chief of the Vancouver Police Department, estimated only 150 "full-time" hippies in the city during

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[6] William J. Rorabaugh, *American Hippies* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 49-50.

[7] *Ibid.*, 50, 53.

[8] *Ibid.*, 62, 66, 67.

the late 1960s, while Dan McLeod, publisher of the *Georgia Straight*, put the number closer to thirty thousand. Historian Lawrence Aronsen pegged it at two to three thousand. Whatever the actual number, law enforcement began to target anyone who fit the description: long hair, poor hygiene, and recreational drug use.[9] Why officers framed suspects this way illustrates what they thought was at stake.

Police viewed the changing social order as an attack on decency. In both the U.S. and Canada, cops imagined themselves as the last line of defense against moral corrosion. Chicago police officer Warren MacAulay regarded the 1960s as a battleground: "we liked what we had . . . we would have done anything to protect that; we were no different than anyone else."[10] Another officer insisted hippies had "soiled our city–soiled by an entire generation who didn't care about the traditional values anymore. Even if they said they did, they did not care . . . in the '60s, our city suffered. I was a cop. I wanted the suffering to end."[11] Members of the RCMP shared these anxieties, and they tried to generate evidence that would consolidate general support against the emerging counterculture. The RCMP followed the lead of the FBI by adding student-agitators, hippies, and feminists to their list of "subversive groups." All were specifically targeted because they challenged conservative values. As in the United States, the RCMP's war on drugs needed a concrete enemy, and in Canada that enemy was also the hippies of Vancouver and Toronto.[12]

The criminalization of counterculture created battles in the spheres of morality, politics, and physical space. Each framed tensions between residents, politicians, cops, and hippies. On one side were lawmakers, some residents, and police officers working to preserve the existing order by driving hippies from Vancouver. On the other side were counterculture businesses, youth communities, and other residents that had sparked the moral panic. During the later 1960s and early 1970s, the two sides would contest their differences through policies, protests, and riots.

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[9] Lawrence Aronsen, *City of Love and Revolution: Vancouver in the Sixties* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2010), 17; Marcel Martel, "They Smell Bad, Have Diseases, and Are Lazy: RCMP officers Reporting on Hippies in the Late Sixties," *Canadian Historical Review* 90 (2009), 228.

[10] Frank Kusch, *Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic National Convention* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 12.

[11] *Ibid*., 1.

[12] Martel, "They Smell Bad," 217, 218, 223.

1.1. "A Scum Community": The Battle for Morality

The RCMP's key goal was to undermine the appeal of hippies, a group that Vancouver Mayor Tom Campbell called "a scum community." Many city officials followed in the mayor's footsteps. In 1967, a Vancouver city council committee report concluded that hippies posed a serious moral and sanitary threat. If the community did not sort itself out, the committee feared worse would unfold.[13] The RCMP launched dozens of undercover operations and publicized the movement's undesirable traits. Officers were guided on how to pay particular attention to general appearance, health and sanitation, attitudes towards education, politics, religion, family, and sex. The aim was to dehumanize hippies and show how they were ruining society. This was an inherently political operation. Reports rarely referenced specific crimes because law breaking was rarely observed. Actual charges of petty theft, dine and dash, and minor possession underscored the low stakes of the hippie threat.[14] In fact, surveillance of appearance, hygiene, and daily activities signalled the RCMP's narrow aim to cast hippies in negative light. Morality, not criminal behaviour, was the core concern.

The moral panic quickly focused on illicit drug use. Toronto and Vancouver RCMP units began to crack down on marijuana in the mid-1960s, and the number of possession charges grew every year. In 1965, 162 people were charged; by 1968 the number had grown to 1,678. In drawing attention to drug use, however, the RCMP unwittingly levered a cultural chasm both in Vancouver and across Canada, and, to their horror, triggered serious discussions about legalizing marijuana. Most Canadians, particularly law enforcement, opposed legalization. Four groups shaped this debate: university students, police forces, the medical community, and pharmaceutical companies. Each tried to frame the conversation. Throughout the 1960s, the law enforcement and medical communities battled to control policy. Members of the medical

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[13] "October 12, 1967 (Page 41 of 68)." *The Vancouver Sun,* 12 Oct 1967.

[14] Vancouver Mayor Tom Campbell referring to hippies, quoted in Daniel Ross, "Panic on Love Street: Citizens and Local Government Respond to Vancouver's Hippie Problem, 1967-68," *BC Studies* 180 (Winter 2013), 31l; Martel, "They Smell Bad," 229.

community expressed views through their professional organization, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), but physicians failed to articulate a single, clear message.[15]

Law enforcement agencies, by contrast, quickly settled on a single, clear view based on data collected by the RCMP on marijuana offences committed under the Narcotic Control Act and Food and Drugs Act. Strong backing by the public buttressed their effort to tackle the problems of youthful alienation and marijuana. To the police, the two issues went hand in hand. Although some Canadians viewed marijuana as "no more a physical or mental danger to its user than orange juice," most saw dire threats. Some mothers and fathers could "see their children growing long hair and dressing in unorthodox fashions . . . [and] they were against hippies, against drugs, and [wanted] the police to do something about both." The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) shared these fears. Some officers equated hippies with an "increase in lawlessness," "acts of senseless vandalism," and "the use of drugs."[16]

Politicians, physicians, and other members of society also invoked moral judgements. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) published reports and adopted resolutions against removing cannabis from the Narcotic Control Act in 1968, 1970, and 1972. Like many other authorities, the CACP claimed marijuana was a gateway to worse substances. Marijuana consumption demoralized people in ways that linked "cleanliness and morals." Officials assured the public that "the police are acting in the interest of society and the police [force] is actually the only one that has the 'eye to eye' contact with the public." Of all groups who weighed in on the marijuana debate, only the police could claim to possess an intimate understanding of the "cold hard facts of life," certainly more so than scientists.[17] The police really did believe they were in the best position to comment on the lawfulness of marijuana and other "soft" drugs.

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[15] Michael Boudreau, "'The Struggle for a Different World': The 1971 Gastown Riot in Vancouver," *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Canadian Social History Series, 2012), 118; Marcel Martel, *Not This Time: Canadians, Public Policy, and the Marijuana Question, 1961-1975*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006, 9; Marcel, Martel, "Law versus Medicine: The Debate over Drug Use in the 1960s." In Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherdale, eds., *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity, Dissent, 1945-75*, 315-33. Vancouver: UBC, 317.

[16] Martel, "Law versus Medicine," 315, 323.

[17] Martel, *Not This Time*, 51-52.

This battle was also waged at the neighbourhood level, in places such as Kitsilano and Gastown, as police sought to regain control of what they saw as declining communities. Youth, counterculture, and hippies threatened the moral order, and because soft drugs led to harder drugs, greater crimes, and further immorality, they had to draw a line. The media aided this campaign by making the long-haired hippie the face of immorality, emphasizing especially injuries, damage, or deaths associated with recreational drug use. Police and policy makers used this formulation to rally the public. Laziness, filth, and disrespect became synonyms for hippies, and hippie characteristics were fused to drug use. The targeted policing that resulted widened a generational gap. Youth felt singled out, and they were more likely to complain about police abuse than older generations. Officers believed hippies had forfeited their rights by associating with lawlessness.[18] The more officers harassed youth, the wider the divide grew. The caricatures of lawless youth and abusive cops became circularly co-produced social constructs.

Although drug use was the central focus of this moral battle, skirmishes spilled into other areas of Vancouver's counterculture protested in the name of feminism, de-colonization, nudity, and the environment. One nude protest at Point Grey's Wreck Beach in August of 1970, organized by American draft resister Korky Day, epitomized the moral breakdown many Vancouverites feared. Public nudity and sexuality were beyond what was considered decent by conservatives. The image of hippies celebrating obscenities such as public nudity underscored the crumbling order. When thirteen nude bathers were arrested on the beach in early August, Day organized a "Nude-In" that attracted three thousand protestors. The crowd of participants and supporters stymied policing. The fact that there were zero arrests only deepened conservative anxiety.[19] The Wreck Beach Nude-In was just one example of how the counterculture community responded to Vancouver's moral policing. The more the police clamped down, the hippies and counterculture enthusiasts rallied against them.

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[18] Martel, *Not This Time*, 15, 55; Martel, "Law versus Medicine," 323.

[19] John Henry, "American Exiles Beyond the Politics of the Draft: Nudity, Feminism, and Third World Decolonization in Vancouver, 1968-71," *BC Studies* 205 (2020), 49.

1.2. "Good, Clean, Decent Government": The Battle for Politics

The presence of counterculture publications aided the organization of protest movements and events. *The Georgia Straight*, an emerging underground newspaper, became the primary forum for counterculture communication. The *Straight* opened its first issue with a story about the Diggers' experimental commune in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. Commenting on Vancouver's countercultural battles with the police, the paper observed that the VPD was repeating the pattern of harassment and violence that had plagued the Haight. In other respects the *Georgia Straight* functioned as a transnational cultural text, detailing the latest drug and music trends from San Francisco, as well as the American counterculture's methods of resisting "creeping old fogeyism." On the local front it attacked the establishment and law enforcement. Its opening editorial refused to recognize the government's legal jurisdiction, proclaiming B.C.'s Indian chiefs as the proper sovereigns while comparing the elected government to an occupying army and depicting police officers in Nazi uniforms.[20]

For their part, city officials tried to ban the *Straight*, suing its editors multiple times in the first years of operation. Vancouver Mayor Tom Campbell, who would become the face of the establishment and campaigned on the promise of securing "good, clean, decent government," saw the paper as "filth" and "perverted." He was particularly offended by the paper's vulgar classified ads, such as "Pete's instant devirginization service" and "If you like 'em enough to ball them, you like 'em enough not to give them the clap." The bold editorials and lude ads were a constant source of friction. The paper was fined so often for publishing lude and pornographic material that by May 1969 it faced as many as twelve counts of obscenity. Forced to obtain a publishing license, the paper's staff went through all the procedures only to have the mayor revoke it in a fit of anger.[21] The *Georgia Straight*'s legal battles were just one front in the city's war against the counterculture. Every time Vancouver officials and conservative citizens tried to drive the counterculture out of the city, however, the movement upped the ante.

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[20] Aronsen, *City of Love and Revolution*, 7; Ron Verzuh, *Underground Times: Canada's Flower-Child Revolutionaries* (Deneau Publishers, 1989), 57

[21] "Campbell Seeks 3rd Mayoral Term with Vow for 'Decent' Government," *Vancouver Sun*, 30 October 1970; Verzuh, 57, 59.

Campbell, elected in 1966 as the youngest mayor in Vancouver history, did not mince words when speaking about the counterculture and hippies: "I think society is entitled to use everything that is available to it in order to stamp out this cancerous growth that is invading society." Campbell battled more than the *Georgia Straight*. A successful real-estate developer, he drew support from middle-class voters and business owners who worried about property values. As their cries grew louder, Campbell went on the offensive, pledging resources to the Vancouver Police Department and support for aggressive tactics. In June of 1970, he offered to purchase additional riot sticks for the VPD out of his own pocket. The department already had 100 sticks but was requesting an additional 150 to help maintain law and order. Chief John Fisk felt that his officers were ill equipped to handle the growing tensions in the city. After encounters in Kitsilano and English Bay, in which officers were sent into crowds without helmets and sticks, the chief demanded more. Campbell promised to fulfill the order, not realizing he did not have the authority. At council meetings, local politicians were fearful that additional arms for the police could lead to further violence. Campbell scoffed at the idea.[22] He was described as "frothing at the mouth" when it came to hippies and the poor, but the attack was much broader.[23]

Surveillance extended beyond drug use and to left-leaning political organizations. The RCMP Security Service was created as an intelligence operation, not for criminal policing. In the 1970s, the Security Service operated as a political apparatus. A highly centralized organization, each of its ten sections had a specific duty. "D Section" was tasked with countersubversion operations against communist ideals and groups. Most of these actions skirted the law. The Service justified their covert tactics as necessary for Canada's security. Undercover operations, intimidation, and wiretaps were the backbone of D-Section operations. One target in Vancouver was the left-wing "Partisan Party." The Security Service operated out of a high-rise building at the edge of the University of British Columbia. It enlisted the help of three Ottawa Mounties to help local officers steal the group's files. The Party was an outgrowth of the radical student movement at Simon Fraser University (SFU). It stressed anti-violence through community-oriented programs, including a newspaper to help win the support of residents. To counter this threat, the

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[22] "3 Feet of Hardwood Becomes a Symbol," *The Vancouver Sun* 11 June 1970.

[23] Aronsen, *City of Love and Revolution*, 22; "Campbell Seeks 3rd Mayoral Term with Vow for 'Decent' Government."

out-of-town Mounties planned to exploit a security flaw in the Partisan operations by physically assaulting the party members who carried home the files each day. They would rough up the members but not kill them. Ideally, they would knock the courier unconscious or break a limb.[24]

The operation was a study in incompetence. The Security Service had already wire-tapped the office phone lines, and an agent had infiltrated the organization. They already knew everything in the files. The three Ottawa based officers were supplied with false identities and unknown to local cops. The VPD, busy with its own investigation, did not know they were interrupting an RCMP operation. The plan seemed perfect. The Security Service had mapped where the assault would occur on a street that was quiet at night, with an empty field on one side and closed commercial businesses on the other. The strongmen would attack the Partisans, leaving them in the street, and an untraceable rental car would whisk the team to safety while a surveillance team watched for witnesses or the VPD. The Service actually hoped the VPD would take the blame for the assault. What it did not anticipate was a change in Partisans carrying the files. Just before the operation, a pregnant woman began accompanying the regular file holders. Initially, administrators instructed the assailants to avoid hitting the woman, but after debate they canceled operation out of fear that the woman might inadvertently be harmed. The Ottawa Mounties returned home empty handed, and the Partisan Party folded of its own inertia a year later.[25]

The RCMP's obsession with political deviance extended onto campuses. The Security Service monitored student organizations and professors. Portraying themselves as sponges soaking up new ideas, they clearly feared the influence of subversive faculty members on pliable students. Files were created on any target that could pose a threat to the country. Focusing on the New Left, Aboriginal activists, and Quebec separatists, the RCMP regarded students as "radical entities."[26] To gain information, it infiltrated classrooms and clubs and employed student informants. But as with the Partisan Party, the RCMP never uncovered a real threat. The alacrity with which they tackled their

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[24] John Sawatsky, *Men in the Shadows: The RCMP Security Service* (Toronto: Doubleday), 24, 267-69.

[25] *Ibid*., 270, 277.

[26] Steve Hewitt, *Spying 101: The RCMP's Secret Activities at Canadian Universities, 1917-1997* (University of Toronto Press: 2002), 120, 157.

mission, however, underscores the depth of fear that police and government officials carried for the rebellious spirit of the baby-boomers.

When spying failed, authorities turned to other tactics. One federal response to the increasing radicalism of students, political movements, and drug usage was to fund youth hostels to keep "idle hands busy" in a time of recession. The hostels would be run in coordination with jobs in the community. With frustrated students and young workers increasingly mobile and turning to the counterculture as a means to live a different way of life, the Pierre Trudeau government opened about twenty hostels to provide healthy and safe shelter. One was in Vancouver on Beatty Street, an old drill hall. Mayor Campbell opposed the 350-bed hostel, believing it would only attract more "drifters, bums and freeloaders." Since his election in 1966, he had promoted the gentrification of Gastown, Kitsilano, and Chinatown as a way to drive out the poor and rootless. The hostel contradicted his vision of respectability.[27] It nevertheless opened in July 1970, but was also slated to close in September, when federal funding ended. As the date of closure approached, tensions grew between the city and residents.

1.3. "You're Not Going to Walk Over Decent People":[28] The Battle for Space

By Summer 1967, Kitsilano had become the unofficial "hippie capital of Canada." Boomers from all backgrounds, including American draft dodgers and thousands of receptive fifteen- to twenty-five-year-old Canadians, were hanging out in the "hip" neighbourhood and conspicuously consuming music, drugs, sex, and the vibe. In the process they left a significant imprint on local businesses and the music scene. The main commercial drag of West 4th Avenue gained the nickname "Love Street," reflecting the kind of community new arrivals hoped to build. It was a budding mecca for artists, students, and young non-conformists; equally important were the low rents, beach access, and close proximity to downtown and the University of British Columbia. Despite

[27] Linda Mahood, "Youth Hostels and Hostile Locals: Vancouver's 'Battle of Jericho,' 1970," *Urban History Review* 48 (University of Toronto Press: 2020), 44-45, 47.

[28] Quote from Tom Campbell. "Campbell Seeks 3rd Mayoral Term with Vow for 'Decent' Government," *The Vancouver Sun*, October 30 1970.

modern nostalgic rituals such as the annual "Hippie Daze" festival, many Vancouverites viewed Kitsilano's budding spirit with apprehension.[29]

Rallying against this invasion, local property owners and city government tried to evict hippies from the neighborhood. From early 1967 onwards, residents complained about excessive noise, vandalism, and open sex in parks during the warm months. Fearing a deterioration of the neighbourhood and concomitant declining property values, they blamed hippies for turning the community into a "psychedelic slum." There was nothing inherently local about this conflict, however. Residents and hippies alike were drawing on broader, continental trends. If hippies were consuming a transnational popular culture, residents were also drawing on that culture when they took a stand to prevent their neighbourhood from becoming the next Haight-Ashbury. Restaurants refused to serve hippies. At least one hippie business was vandalized. The VPD concentrated it's forces on Love Street to crack down on the crowds, emphasizing strict enforcement, including regular sweeps of people congregating on 4th Avenue and in Love Street cafes and music venues, would frustrate the hippie youth. Cops also tended to look the other way when hippies were assaulted. Few they searched were charged with crimes. Patrol cars nevertheless rolled down Love Street all the time. Some weekend nights it seemed there were "more cops than hippies." Their weapon was the vagrancy charge for adults and suspicion of delinquency for juveniles. Both allowed police to stop and question anyone. By late August 1967, they had filed thirty-eight vagrancy charges, a drastic increase from nine the previous year. About two hundred minors were taken into custody. The tactics backfired, however. Harassment created common cause, inspiring hippies to hang around more, and so tensions only rose as targeted youth and new social programs gave Boomers more reason to be in the area.[30]

Campbell's government formed special committees to address the growing hippie menace, but concerns abated as summer turned to fall. Students left Love Street of their own accord and returned to campuses. The problem seemed to solve itself. By spring 1968, however, Love Street was again buzzing. Complaints began to pile at the VPD and city hall, followed by a series of drug arrests around 4th Avenue. RCMP officers had been living in Kitsilano disguised as hippies. Their drug buys and arrests were part

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[29] Aronsen, *City of Love and Revolution*, 3, 6Ross, "Panic on Love Street," 11-12.
[30] Ross, "Panic on Love Street," 12, 17, 19, 26, 28.

of larger RCMP and VPD operations that generated nearly fifty arrests for possession and trafficking. Police also used the Public Works Act to arrest seventeen youths for loitering at city hall. The action, endorsed by the government, was meant as a "warning to hippies not to congregate in Vancouver," but it had little effect.[31] Complaints of hippie activity continued unabated. The city had failed to contain the problem on Love Street. Instead, it spread throughout the lower mainland. At Simon Fraser University, multiple occupations occurred during the late 1960s. The largest, in 1968, featured 180 students occupying four floors of administration offices in the library. After two days of occupation, the RCMP arrived to end the protest. Moving in without batons, they removed anyone who did not voluntarily leave. Despite the non-violent ending, student attacks on authority and "anarchic" tactics led two Mounties to remember the event as a "riot."[32]

In May of 1971, hippies occupied the Hudson's Bay Company store in the last of a long line of confrontations between the Bay and youth, this time in response to the store refusing to serve hippies at their lunch counter and removing them from the property for loitering. Police carried protesters out of the store and into jail. Later that night more protesters surrounded the station to demand the protestors' release. Assembling the riot squad to clear the street, the VPD forcefully dissolved the protest. Gathering again in June, another riot squad cleared a protest camp at the entrance to Stanley Park. Claimed as a "people's park and camp," the squatters were protesting a proposed Four Seasons Hotel development. Although arrests were made, the camp remained. In July, protesters again rallied at the courthouse, gathering to hear speeches by the Vancouver Liberation Front calling for Mayor Campbell's resignation. Predictably, a riot squad again arrived to break up the crowd and arrest twenty-five protestors.[33]

Former VPD Sergeant Joe Swan noted that "there were over seventy demonstrations to police, men were continually being taken from their regular patrol duties. Riot equipment became almost standard uniform." The city had become a battleground, egged on by Campbell's declaration that hippies were "not going to walk over decent people," but by the early 1970s the battlelines had shifted from Kitsilano to the downtown neighbourhood of Gastown, which had become a symbol of both

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[31] *Ibid.*, 32-33.

[32] Hewitt, *Spying 101*, 149.

[33] Barnholden, *Reading the Riot Act: A Brief History of Riots in Vancouver* (Anvil Press: 2005), 89; Mahood, "Youth Hostels and Hostile Locals," 48.

repression and resistance. Some described the area as a “police state” during summer 1971. Gastown, or “Grasstown,” as it was sometimes called, was considered by the police to be the “soft-drug capital” of Canada. To combat the problem, and in response to escalating tensions since 1967, the VPD launched “Operation Dustpan.” Across multiple weeks in late July, a special force targeted soft drug users and distributors in Gastown. To the VPD, soft drugs were easily accessible and led to experimentation with other substances. Largely, this meant marijuana and related illicit products. Undercover officers attempted to purchase drugs, arresting anyone they could entrap. In other instances, uniformed officers occupied entire sections of troubled areas, closed exits, and searched everyone within the confines. Officers trashed hotels and bars that known dealers patronized. It was another message to the community. At the Last Chance Saloon, police ripped apart the walls, smashed musical equipment, and poured paint on a box of fruit. One patron of the hippie hangout remarked that “they want to destroy us by destroying our property.” On the streets of Gastown, police acted aggressively, reportedly using a chokehold outside the Gastown Inn to force the release a cap of heroin from the suspect’s mouth. When that did not work, they used handcuffs to pry open his mouth, breaking several teeth in the process.[34] By its end Operation Dustpan had sent nearly 100 youths to jail under possession or trafficking charges.

Operation Dustpan revealed a shift in tactics from the vagrancy and delinquency charges earlier in Kitsilano. By the early ‘70s occurred, the battles between the police, city, and youth had escalated. Having failed to disperse the counterculture that they feared, officials adopted ever more aggressive responses to the hippie presence. Despite little evidence of criminal activities other than soft drug usage, city officials were waging a determined war against hippies, but all they succeeded in doing was heightening the counterculture’s will to maintain their presence, continue their protests, and live as they wished to live. In trying to drive the hippies out, conservative Vancouverites only gave them more motivation to stay. To understand what happened in Gastown in August of 1971, however, we must place the events of one evening in a much longer train of confrontations, really the culmination of years of hippie disobedience and police response. Law enforcement was tired of the cat and mouse

[34] Barnholden, *Reading the Riot Act*, 90; Michael Boudreau, “Hippies, Yippies, The Counterculture, and the Gastown Riot in Vancouver, 1968-71,” *BC Studies* 197 (2018), 39; “Anniversary Smoke-in Set for Today,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 7 August 2001, 18.

game. Hippies were tired of being abused. Tensions were mounting. Violence was looming.

Chapter 2. The Battle for Vancouver

2.1. "Nowhere Else to Go, We're Hanging on Here": The Battle of Jericho

The federal government's Beatty Street summer hostel program sparked the first major conflict between Vancouver's hippies and police. The hostel was always scheduled to close when federal subsidies terminated on September 8, 1970. When word of the shutdown spread, however, hostellers called an emergency meeting to address their future. A reported 600 hostellers and local youth attended the meeting, voting to stage a non-violent sit-in when the police arrived to reclaim the building. The Vancouver Liberation Front, a countercultural organization with roots at SFU, offered to recruit support among students returning to local campuses that fall. Some students even offered to occupy the hostel on a rotating basis. The hostellers drafted demands, including extending funding, allowing residents to run the hostel year-round, and helping occupiers find work in the community. This was a planned peaceful occupation, but local police feared something more threatening. The Beatty Street property had been a former drill hall for the Department of National Defense (DND). It had been leased for the summer as a civilian hostel, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Vancouver Police Department both had jurisdiction. This was cop turf, and the cultural context of the moment also mattered. With fresh memories of large countercultural demonstrations, both constabulary forces feared the possibility of a violent demonstration.[1]

The initial confrontation was peaceful and constructive. On September 8, the hostellers barricaded themselves inside the building. Mayor Tom Campbell feared the hostel would become a "rallying point for radicals," but a mere nine hours later the federal government announced it was extending the hostel contract three weeks and moving residents to another Canadian Forces compound on the west side of Vancouver at Jericho Beach.[2] The episode was significant for hostellers and countercultural politics in Vancouver. They had demonstrated that hippies could win a battle for space without

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[1] Linda Mahood, "Youth Hostels and Hostile Locals: Vancouver's 'Battle of Jericho,' 1970," *Urban History Review* 48 (Fall 2020), 49.

[2] *Ibid*., 47-49.

violence and that, contrary to the angsty Campbell, they were not going anywhere. Conversely, Beatty Street was merely one battle in what was already an extended conflict, the resolution to which the federal contract extension simply postponed.

On September 12, the hostellers moved across town to the Jericho Canadian Forces Base. Located at the edge of the tony Point Grey neighborhood, the new hostel—yet another military building—was adjacent to some of Vancouver's oldest and most beautiful homes. The relocation brought youth hostellers into direct contact with some of Vancouver's most affluent and outspoken citizens. One of the greatest resulting tensions stemmed from the gender rebalancing during the move. By the end of September, women accounted for nearly 30 percent of the hostel population. This directly violated the strict gender segregation rules of the hostel program and increased existing fears that the hostel had devolved into an "immoral brothel" of free love and naked hippies. Mayor Campbell, never one to neglect an opportunity to stoke fear, remarked that the federal government had "moved the brothel to Point Grey." Worse still, the hippies would be unsupervised in a residential neighbourhood. Campbell advised residents to lock their doors and hide their lawnmowers. Military families stationed at Jericho were also worried. Married quarters were only fifty feet from the new hostel location. One mother complained about having to raise children in the presence of "drug-taking hippies" and "long-hairs." Underlying Campbell's motives was the very real political damage dealt to his campaign to remove the counterculture. City and police officials had failed to eradicate the infestation on Love Street. Rather than scaring the hippies away, their plague had infiltrated the high-brow neighbourhoods Campbell had vowed to protect. Canadian youth were rushing to Vancouver and the Jericho hostel. By October, close to 90 percent of the 200 residents hailed from elsewhere.[3] Conservative Vancouver was losing control of the city.

For both sides the move was but an interregnum. The hostel was still scheduled to close on October 2. Sticking with what had worked, the occupants planned another sit-in to delay until yet another residence could be located. They also demanded meal provisions and support for the businesses some members had begun to operate out of the hostel. Hippie opponents were also strategizing, however. Meetings between the Secretary of State, RCMP, and city controllers paradoxically concluded the mood at

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[3] *Ibid*., 50-51.

Jericho was "too explosive" yet were determined to close the hostel. Their embrace of force contrasted sharply with the previous standoff. No evidence existed that hostellers would resort to violence. The Vancouver Liberation Front had actually circulated leaflets advising protestors not to panic, run, or fight. They also posted a mandate against alcohol and drug use.[4] While it was clear the occupants were intent on staying, nothing about the situation supported the RCMP's belief that force was necessary.

To understand why constabulary favoured force, however, we have to look beyond the particulars of Jericho to what they thought was at stake. Tensions between cops and hippies had mounted for four years, and officials thought this was the moment to re-establish control and that they had to act from a position of strength. Sociological studies on police attitudes revealed dangerous trends in officer training and handling of crowds. David Schweingruber's "Mob Sociology and Escalated Force" examines the roots of mob sociology in police literature. Early writings assumed that every crowd had the potential for violence and transformation into an angry mob. This inherent danger was accepted as common knowledge and disseminated into police manuals. Police organizations therefore focused on controlling crowds through force. Schweingruber argues that this created self-fulfilling prophecies: the physical force used by police prompted physical responses by crowds. Peaceful protests escalated into violent riots, and the more agitated the crowd, the more police felt a loss of control, communication broke down, and physical force became the only means of response. Each perceived loss of control led to further escalation. There were in fact two mobs: the crowd and the police, but it was the mob-like mentality among officers who felt threatened that most triggered the possibility of violence. The language used to describe violence and their response to it exposed the mentality of officers under duress. From a sociological perspective, it was the fear of losing control that inspired violence to regain what had seemingly been lost. Sociologist Anne Nassauer describes this as the "loss of control pathway": multiple factors combine to create a sense of fear, and officers respond

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[4] *Ibid*., 51-52.

violently to actions that threaten their authority because they are "deeply concerned" with presenting themselves as in charge.[5]

Determined to re-establish their authority, RCMP and Vancouver officials instead botched another resolution. The city tried to force hostellers out on October 8 by terminating the hostel food service contract and shutting off water, heat, and power, but hostellers responded by filling water bottles from hoses of nearby residences and removing a manhole cover at the hostel compound to create an outhouse. Fearing adverse health consequences, the Vancouver Health Department and Point Grey residents demanded the city restore services on October 10, and so the hostellers won another round.[6]

Days later the BC Attorney General ordered eviction. Vancouver Chief Constable John Fisk, who had a reputation for seeking confrontations with youth, tried to establish a dialogue with occupants, but after discussions the Attorney General and VPD decided to have the RCMP read the notice of eviction outside the hostel and then clear protestors while the VPD managed bystanders, only engaging protestors in the event of a commotion. One hundred VPD officers nevertheless arrived armed with riot gear, horses, and motorcycles. The department equipment log recorded at least eight sets of helmets and thirty-six-inch riot sticks signed out on the day of the eviction. Some occupants left the hostel of their own accord, but forty-two remained behind after the notice was read. Other protestors stationed themselves on the grass and sang protest songs. Word spread quickly. Hundreds of university students and hippies arrived to join in the singing and dancing. Although the mood remained peaceful, the size of the crowd led the RCMP to declare an unlawful assembly. Protestors were given five-minutes to disperse, so they moved onto the road, backing up traffic on West 4th Avenue and chanting: "all we want is love and peace," "all we want is a place to sleep," and "here come the pigs." It was then that the VPD removed badges, pulled riot sticks, and jabbed and booted protestors. Eight officers and twenty-five protestors were injured in the ensuing melee. Seven were arrested for unlawful assembly. Dubbed the "Battle of

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[5] David Schweingruber, "Mob Sociology and Escalated Force: Sociology's Contribution to Repressive Police Tactics," *The Sociological Quarterly* 41 (June 2000), 376, 283; Anne Nassauer, "Forward Panic and Police Riots," *Framing Excessive Violence* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 44.

[6] Mahood, "Youth Hostels and Hostile Locals," 52.

Jericho," the police evicted more than 100 occupants.[7] Mainstream media and civic authorities framed it as a restoration of order, but little seemed to change.

Despite the violence, Jericho residents did not leave the city. About one hundred of the displaced hostellers spent that first evening sleeping in the Student Union Building on the University of British Columbia (UBC) campus. And despite Mayor Campbell's vows to rid the city of the hippie menace, most protesters just moved across town to the YMCA the next day.[8] The more hippies hung around, the more Campbell and the police believed they had to re-establish proper order. Police tactics at Love Street and Jericho and Campbell's insults in the press only fueled the hippie movement. Jericho was supposed to be the counterculture's Waterloo. Instead, it was just another battle in a war neither side expected to run this long.

Protests such as the Jericho occupation had helped to forge a transnational community of countercultural protest. American draft resisters helped to organize many demonstrations in Vancouver. Eric Sommer, a Philadelphian exile, immersed himself in the local counterculture in a way that made him seem a conspicuous threat to local police. Sommer wrote political articles for the *Georgia Straight*, commenting on housing, gentrification, protest tactics, people's rights, and the Love Street social programs. He also wrote anonymously for the *Yellow Journal*, a spin-off counterculture newspaper. It was telling that the VPD specifically mentioned Sommer as having attended the Jericho occupation. Kenneth Lester was Sommer's Canadian counterpart, an activist who also wrote for the *Straight*. According to his brother, Lester had helped to organize several protest and rallies, including the Four Seasons Park occupation and Hudson's Bay store sit-ins.[9] Lester, Sommer, and organizations such as the VLF, Yippie!, and Partisan Party were driving forces in the local counterculture. When Operation Dustpan targeted

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[7] *Ibid*., 53; Vancouver Police Department, *Riot Equipment Control Log 1970-72* (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Police Department, 1970-72). Vancouver Police Museum and Archives, Vancouver B.C., Canada; Michael Barnholden, *Reading the Riot Act: A Brief History of Riots in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Anvil Press, 2005), 90.

[8] Mahood, "Youth Hostels and Hostile Locals," 56.

[9] John Henry, "American Exiles Beyond the Politics of the Draft: Nudity, Feminism, and Third World Decolonization in Vancouver, 1968-71," *BC Studies* 205 (2020), 51; "Kenneth Frederick Lester (Ken)," *Vancouver Sun*, 20 April 2021.

hippies, youth, and Gastown residents during summer 1971, Sommer and Lester used the pages of the *Georgia Straight* to propose yet another equal and opposite response.

2.2. Ice-Cream Sandwiches, Mooning, and Riot Sticks: The Gastown Riot

A year of demonstrations, protests, and conflicts came to a head on the evening of 7 August 1971, culminating in a night of violence now known as the Gastown Riot. The triggering event was a mass gathering widely advertised as a "smoke-in," an evening in Gastown to protest drug laws, police actions, and Operation Dustpan. For the VPD, the event quickly took on the airs of a last stand against immorality. Sommer, one of the key organizers, described it as a "non-violent, peaceful civil disobedience in response to the official violence of Operation Dustpan."[10] Publicized in the *Georgia Straight*, the planning was scrupulously legal and brazenly defiant of cultural norms. The VPD were given ample warning to prepare a response. What followed has been meticulously analyzed by multiple investigations at the time and by scholars in the decades since. Few details are disputed, and remarkable consensus exists abut what happened, yet the unleashing of violence, seen as a break with policing norms in Canada, was in fact well in line with transnational trends in policing, and the transnational framework helps us understand why Vancouver's police riot was anything but an isolated event.

On the appointed evening, hippies began to gather near Maple Tree Square around 7, well before the scheduled start. Police officers were already present, yet nothing was done to keep the streets clear. Corporal Kenneth McLarty, who had been involved in Operation Dustpan, was among the forces in Gastown. His duty was to supervise seven uniformed officers. Wandering through the growing crowd, McLarty "wanted to patrol in the normal manner." At first, he saw nothing different from any other Saturday night, later remarking it looked like the "nice place" it could be. But the crowd of "young, long-haired people" kept growing. Shortly after 8 p.m., McLarty took another tour with senior Inspector Robert Abercrombie and Sergeant Wiebe. The square was now choked with people. Drums added to the din. By 8:25 the crowd had grown to perhaps 500 people. Someone handed out ice-cream sandwiches. Others built a platform. As the

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[10] "Witness Quizzed on Idea for Smoke-in," *Vancouver Sun*, 23 September 1971, 18.

drums kept a steady beat, a speaker roused the crowd with shouts of “fuck the pigs” and “power to the people.” McLarty reportedly saw several young people coming from the square and Water Street carrying paving stones and large concrete. Others were emptying soft drink bottles. By 9:20, traffic was gridlocked. The crowd numbered between 1,500 and 2,000, and another stand had risen. The drum tempo rose. Marijuana smoke permeated the air. The crowd seemed increasingly excited, and McLarty thought some people were “freaked out.”[11]

McLarty and several officers next moved into the crowd to guide trolley buses through the square. He noted that people cooperated with police requests and were still law abiding and peaceful, but soon after the temperament changed. The more obscenities the speaker used, the more excited the crowd grew. McLarty heard breaking glass and saw two youths climbing the Europe Hotel. They reached a balcony and dropped their pants to moon the crowd. Although public nakedness was so regular in the 1970s that mooning devolved into a clichéd and silly act, in 1971 it was still an arrestable act of indecency. The noise was deafening. McLarty conferred with Abercrombie just before 10. He reported that windows might have been broken on the other side of the hotel and that people in the crowd were breaking bottles. And there was more. McLarty thought he recognized someone from the Jericho Hostel protest, and that the crowd had become “vociferous.” Chants of “kill the pigs” made him feel anxious. Later during the inquiry, when McLarty was presented with contradictory information about the crowd’s mood, that the shouting people had been smiling and laughing, he replied, “I cannot see anything to smile about when you say things like that.” Abercrombie echoed these sentiments. Both feared the crowd was turning riotous and that they were losing control. McLarty advised moving the crowd.[12]

What happened next in Maple Tree Square was a classic example of how cultures of protest and cultures of policing circularly escalate toward violence. This was exactly what Anne Nassauer identified as the sequence of actions that can trigger “the loss of control pathway,” a kind of mass anxiety that quickly exacerbates inter-group tensions. The key factors are spatial incursions of security boundaries *and* police

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[11] Thomas A. Dohm, *Report on Gastown Inquiry*, (BC: Victoria, 1971); “Crowds Mood Changed Before Police Moved In,” *The Vancouver Sun*, 21 September 1971, 13, 18.

[12] “Crowds Mood Changed Before Police Moved In,” 18; Michael Boudreau, “Hippies, Yippies, The Counterculture, and the Gastown Riot in Vancouver, 1968-71,” *BC Studies* 197 (2018), 58.

mismanagement. When the Maple Tree Square protestors infiltrated the police line, regardless of intent, they only heightened officer anxieties. And without a clearly laid out, prearranged plan, Vancouver's nervous officers responded as police often do in such situations: violently, albeit in highly varied ways. A second key factor was the training police organizations devoted to officers. Put simply, the less training an individual received, the more likely mismanagement would contribute to ensuing violence.[13] Although developed from events in other cities, Schweingruber's study of mob behavior, and Nassauer's concept of loss of control pathway, perfectly capture the sociological dynamics that unfolded in Maple Tree Square on that August night. Dumb bluster and anxious cops created a feedback loop in which the police felt compelled to use physical force to control what they had predetermined to be a "dangerous" crowd. The more anxious they felt about their own space, the more they resorted to physical force, and the more they literally pushed protesters, the more dangerous the crowd became.

McLarty and Abercrombie's descriptions of the event reveal the sociological factors that Nassauer and Schweingruber outline. As the crowd grew and insults mounted, officers perceived a deterioration of control. The lack of planning before the event exacerbated anxieties. Outnumbered, disrespected, and without clear communication, officers were primed to fear the crowd. McLarty believed he saw hippies carrying bricks and bottles into the crowd. Chants of "fuck the pigs," "kill the pigs," and the mooning challenged his sense of propriety and control. Anticipating trouble because of the very identity of the protesters, McLarty's sense of eroded authority was the final straw; breaking glass thrust the VPD down Nassauer's loss of control pathway. Officers entered the crowd with riot sticks and horses in a way that could only, according to Schweingruber, heighten protester anxieties. Seeking to quell a disturbance, police instead incited a crowd response that only confirmed the police's pre-existing expectations. The hippies meant to challenge the law, and the police intended to beat some longhairs.

Taking in the reports of McLarty and other junior officers, Abercrombie decided to clear the streets. He grabbed a megaphone and ordered the area cleared; he gave the crowd of 1,500 the impossibly short interval of two minutes to exit, but in the middle of the crowd, not even McLarty heard Abercrombie, just random shouts of "fuck you."

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[13] Nassauer, "Forward Panic and Police Riots," 37, 44.

Abercrombie quickly ordered four mounted officers into the crowd, followed by more in riot gear and wielding batons. The effect was electric. Demonstrators fled in all directions. Some hid in store entrances as officers gave chase. Others poured into restaurants. The mounted police tried to herd hippies out of the area, but uniformed officers blocked each end of the square. Trapped, the crowd was beaten by riot sticks and horse hooves.[14]

How does a group gain dominance in a protest? As long as police and protestor spaces stay intact, equilibrium prevails and serious conflict rarely occurs. Large groups and controlled lines actually inhibit violence, but panic and violence unfold when order breaks down, especially when smaller groups of rivals square off directly. Dominance is more easily established in these situations, especially towards actors who turn their backs, are isolated, or fall. In Gastown, the surge of officers into the crowd unleashed these dynamics. Officers began to swing and kick. The tensions of the moment were informed by all previous demonstrations. Feelings of dominance fed a frenzied rush of destroy. Nassauer notes that in most cases of police panic and violence, three to seven actors attack a single opponent. Once one acts violently, others join in and the situation grows out of proportion, seemingly senseless and excessive.[15]

Abercrombie and McLarty felt the obscenities, property damage, and indecencies had shattered all sense of decency. Abercrombie's order to clear the square fractured the line between the groups. Officers on horseback initiated a physical confrontation, prompting others to join. The VPD violence seemed necessary to regain what had been lost in the previous year, and, in their minds at least, it worked. Their sense of power and dominance restored, they could only conclude the incident had been a success. In retrospect, the VPD's decision to escalate can seem utterly predictable, especially when protesters affirmed police expectations by throwing rocks, broken bottles, and brickbats of cement. The square devolved into an overdetermined combat zone. The sequence of events also had the effect of confirming a command decision to insert twenty plainclothes members of Operation Dustpan amongst the crowd. McLarty later explained that he "felt it advantageous to use the Dustpan crew merely as observers," but when

[14] Dohm, *Report on Gastown Inquiry*.

[15] Nassauer, "Forward Panic and Police Riots," 40.

violence erupted, the Dustpan officers rallied their colleagues.[16] By the end seventy-nine people had been arrested.

The Gastown Riot was the culmination of a year of unrelenting tension between police and hippies, and as McLarty's recognition of the Jericho protestor revealed, these were intimate associations that only heightened the personal and emotional responses on each side. When the Battle for Jericho failed to drive hippies from the city, the presence of known enemies only further added to the conflict. Familiar faces confirmed that this was an organized attack against what was called "law-and-order" but really something far more socially and culturally encompassing. Indeed, these were not random protests but part of a year-long itinerary of escalating skirmishes. Two other faces in the crowd help illustrate what was at stake for each side. Eric Sommer and Kenneth Lester, alleged members of the Youth International Party in Vancouver, had been key organizers of the smoke-in; they had also been spotted at many previous protests. Sommer had reportedly attended at least sixteen demonstrations in B.C. between April 1970 and the Gastown Riot.[17]

Sommer denied bearing ill-intentions, insisting the smoke-in was a non-violent, peaceful act of civil disobedience in response to police efforts to evict the alternative community from Gastown, but witnesses claimed Lester had encouraged protestors to block bus traffic. Sommer also denied seeing projectiles among the protestors before the police moved in, but he did admit some threw bricks once the police turned violent. The use of projectiles is contested. Protestors collectively denied any plans to use bricks, stones, and bottles, while officers such as Sargent James Adams remembered dodging stones, bottles, and firecrackers hurled from the crowd. Working undercover with Operation Dustpan, constables Anderson and Stevens reported finding a stash of broken bricks and stones earlier that day piled on the roof of the nearby Fraser Rooms. Most worrisome–but also telling of the amount of surveillance prior to Gastown–the stones had not been spied in previous days. The roof was accessed by a hatch that led to rooms known to be occupied by local youth. Anderson and Stevens blocked the hatch before the event. McLarty also recalled seeing fifteen to twenty people carry stones and debris being carried into the crowd. This is why he did not think it was safe to confront

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[16] Dohm, *Report on Gastown Inquiry*; "Crowds Mood Changed Before Police Moved In," 18.

[17] "Witness Quizzed on Idea for Smoke-in," 18.

the group. He added, "I had to be aware of causing an incident. I did not want to initiate something which perhaps was not going to happen."[18] The police nevertheless attacked. The demonstration in force was in large part due to the familiarity of the two groups by August 1971. While hippies saw the Gastown demonstration as a means to cultural change, the VPD viewed it as an opportunity to finish what they had started at Jericho. Both hoped for an imminent denouement; neither got their wish.

Following broad and critical press coverage, a Vancouver Police Department internal investigation reported on "the Gastown Disturbance." The unsurprising conclusion was that the VPD had not used undue force. Senior officers explained that people were prodded with sticks to enter wagons, but they had not seen anyone beaten by men on foot. The report acknowledged that while some acts might have appeared violent in the eyes of bystanders, the authors insisted the actions taken were not undue to anyone with police experience. The VPD claimed that the number of non-protesting civilians in the area had undermined their ability to control events. Officers were unable to tell bystanders from participants, and they had not planned ahead of time because they did not foresee a major incident.[19] As with the Jericho incident, however, the VPD's equipment log bares a muddier reality. Inspector Abercrombie and Sergeant Wiebe signed out a unit of "green" gear at 6:30 that evening. Fifteen minutes later McLarty signed for eight more units of "orange" gear.[20] In other words, contrary to official explanations, several lead officers had armed themselves for battle three and a half hours before they initiated the violence.

Dissatisfied with the VPD report, the provincial government formed a Royal Commission led by BC Supreme Court Justice Thomas A. Dohm. Over ten days of public testimony, the inquiry heard from forty-eight witnesses, considered a small mountain of photographs and film footage, and produced sixteen volumes of records.

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[18] *Ibid.*; "Policeman says Bricks Found Before Gastown Riot," *The Globe and Mail*, 22 September 1971, 3.

[19] "Police Reveal Rules on Riot Stick Use," *The Vancouver Sun*, 30 September 1971, 17; Boudreau, "Hippies, Yippies, The Counterculture, and the Gastown Riot in Vancouver, 1968-71," 60-61.

[20] Due to how the equipment log was organized, offering only colour codes with no legend, it is unclear which type of riot gear was signed out. Vancouver Police Department, *Riot Equipment Control Log 1970-72* (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Police Department, 1970-72). Vancouver Police Museum and Archives, Vancouver B.C., Canada.

The conclusion diverged markedly from the VPD investigation. The Royal Commission mainly blamed police for escalating violence. Dohm concluded that the "arrival of the mounted policemen caused panic, terror, and resentment." The weight of evidence showed that most protestors were not unpleasant, let alone a mob. Amid the music, chants, and bongo drums, a small core did bait police with insults, but if their intent was to incite violence, they had failed. This was not a crowd ready to riot. Dohm condemned the police intervention. Riot gear and horses should have been last resorts, and some officers had indeed used excessive force.[21]

Reactions to these reports fell along predictable lines. Despite Dohm's strong words, he commended most VPD officers for acting in an exemplary manner in the face of insults and abuse and then singled out Lester and Sommer for pointed political criticism, calling the duo "bad" for challenging "authority in every way possible" and trying to lure the crowd into a confrontation. The *Georgia Straight* called the inquiry a "whitewash." The B.C. Civil Liberties Association also released a report on the riot and police-community relations, accusing the VPD of fueling conflict by arriving in Gastown with a "very negative . . . and perhaps even spiteful" attitude. Meanwhile, mainline media revealed broad distaste for hippies. Morlaine Hawer of Burnaby wrote to Mayor Campbell, "my only criticism of the police action is that they were too lenient, they should have used their clubs more on the heads of some of the mindless weirdos!"[22] For Hawer and other conservative Vancouverites, the Gastown Riot was a brutal but necessary act.

The attitudes of VPD officers and some residents paralleled views among police and conservatives across North America. The massing counterculture from the Jericho occupation through the smoke-in at Maple Tree Square represented a signal assault on community morality and civility. When asked about the makeup of the crowd, officer McLarty estimated that 60 to 70 percent were of the "hippie crowd," while the rest were "citizens."[23] McLarty had rhetorically segregated longhaired youth outside the sociopolitical category of citizen. Like the officers at the Democratic Convention in Chicago in August 1968, Vancouver police in August 1971 saw a spoiled and lazy

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[21] Dohm, *Report on Gastown Inquiry*.

[22] Dohm, *Report on Gastown Inquiry*; Michael Boudreau, "'The Struggle for a Different World': The 1971 Gastown Riot in Vancouver," *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Canadian Social History Series, 2012), 128, 131.

[23] "Crowds Mood Changed Before Police Moved In," 18.

generation who stood outside legitimate society. And like Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, Vancouver Mayor Tom Campbell staked his political legitimacy on bringing law-and-order to streets. The VPD translated Campbell's political platform into policy through Operation Dustpan and similar responses across 1970 and 1971, using law-and-order tactics to police the peaceable kingdom.

Epilogue

Living adjacent to what Pierre Trudeau called "the 800-pound gorilla," Canadians have struggled to develop a national identity that separates them from their American neighbors. A key theme in this language of distinction has been the history of violence, most notably the idealization of Canada as "the peaceable kingdom." This nationalistic mythos rests upon the notion that Canadian history is less violent and revolutionary than the United States. Politicians and scholars have propagated this mythology by contrasting American aggressiveness with Canadian tolerance.[1] By minimizing the violence, restlessness, and lawlessness of Canada's past, some historians have tried to instill a sense of national pride. Canada's media has further cultivated this ideal through its interpretations of violence, willfully distorting the motives and objectives of Canadian violence through caricatures of the politics that underlay conflict. In portraying the perpetrators as riffraff, conspirators, and mindless aggressors, they cast violence as a cultural aberration.[2] Canadian exceptionalism, of course, extends beyond the theme of spectacular violence. Conservative Canadians have highlighted the nation's embrace of multi-culturalism and diversity to deflect attention from state policies of assimilation and consequent genocide, and mainstream media and public servants parade social programs for addiction and poverty to contrast themselves against a more aggressive American approach. In each instance, Canadians crafted narratives to mask the similarities between themselves and their southern neighbours. Their differences, though, are less than they assert.[3]

Like their American counterparts, Canadian police have relied on violence to maintain order in the decades since the Gastown Riot. The anxieties, training, and contexts that drove American and Canadian police to violence have remained a fixture.

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[1] Scott W. See, "The Intellectual Construction of Canada's 'Peaceable Kingdom' Ideal," *Journal of Canadian Studies* Vol. 52 No. 2 (2018), 522.

[2] J.A. Frank, Michael J. Kelly, and Thomas H. Mitchell, "The Myth of the 'Peaceable Kingdom': Interpretations of Violence in Canadian History," *Peace Research* Vol. 15 No. 3 (1983), 53.

[3] For the varied strains of Canadian exceptionalism see Philippe Bourgois, "Crack and the Political Economy of Social Suffering," *Addiction Research and Theory* 11: 1 (2003), 31-37; Laura J. Kwak, "Problematizing Canadian Exceptionalism: A study of right-populism, white nationalism, and Conservative political parties," *Onati Sicio-Legal Series* 10:6 (2020), 1166-1192; Will Kymlicka, "Politics of Identity–II: Being Canadian," *Government and Opposition* 38:3 (2003), 357-385.

These strains remind us that policing is a transnational institution, and its embrace of force has been widely noted. Numerous investigations and commissions have explored police violence. In the United States, the National Kerner Commission on Civil Disorder, National Eisenhower Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, and National Scranton Commission on Campus Unrest. Similar civilian boards and oversight agencies emerged in Canada, including the Independent Investigations Office (IIO) in British Columbia to counterbalance internal investigations by police agencies when police actions caused death or serious harm. As with the Gastown Riot investigations, commissions criticized police responses to mass movements. Meeting violence with violence did not solve community problems, yet little resulted from this criticism. Like in the U.S., Canadian policing grew ever more tarnished in the eyes of the public. British Columbia endured the highest rate of police-involved deaths in Canada, and police literature and training still did not change.[4]

Neither did the media undergo much of a reassessment. In June 1972, the Vancouver Police Department had another close encounter with the counterculture, this time during a Rolling Stones concert at the Pacific Coliseum. Undercover VPD officers learned that the Clark Park Gang, an East Vancouver youth gang comprised of working-class kids who mainly stole cars and dealt marijuana, had planned a confrontation during the concert. Rumours swirled that up to two hundred weapons were buried in the nearby park, and that the gang had counterfeited two thousand tickets. When a crowd of ticketless patrons tried to push their way into the Coliseum, shattering windows and overpowering staff members, the riot squad was mobilized. Met by a barrage of rocks and bottles, the police squared off against the Clark Park hooligans in a melee that included Molotov cocktails and a railway spike fired from a makeshift cannon. In this case it seems the VPD knew exactly who they were battling, painting the gang as the orchestrators of violence in its own history, *One Hundred Years of Service*, but almost no one else made the distinction. The local media hardly mentioned the gang, preferring

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[4] Howard Rahtz, *Race, Riots, and the Police* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2016), 105; "Who We Are*," Independent Investigations Office of BC*, IIO, IIOBC, June 12, 2020, https://iiobc.ca/about-us/who-we-are/); "B.C. Has Country's Highest Rate of Police-Involved Deaths, Groundbreaking CBC Data Reveals" *CBC News* April 5, 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/police-related-deaths-canada-bc-vancouver-boyd-edey-database-1.4603820); David Schweingruber, "Mob Sociology and Escalated Force: Sociology's Contribution to Repressive Police Tactics," *The Sociological Quarterly* 41 (June 2000), 382.

to foreground hippies and rock and roll.[5] In the cultural ferment of the era, the chaos surrounding the Stones concert still seemed linked to the battles that spanned from Love Street to Jericho to Gastown.

Secular politics resurfaced as a point of friction between police and protesters in the late 1990s. For six days at the of November 1997, eight to ten thousand journalists, government officials, and corporate executives gathered at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, making it Vancouver's biggest event in a decade. In hosting notorious dictators from Indonesia and China, however, APEC also made itself a conspicuous target for advocates of human and workers' rights, the environment, and critics of globalization. APEC created a perfect context for gathering both the movers and shakers of capitalism and large assemblies opposed to those very figures and forces. Not surprisingly, the forum also broke all Canadian records for security costs. More than three thousand Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Vancouver Police Department officers patrolled the event. The City of Vancouver budgeted $1.5 million for policing, and the RCMP estimated overall costs for protection reached $15 million.[6]

More than a quarter of a century after Gastown, however, APEC also showed how little had changed in terms of policing's use of violence to maintain control. Security officials feared a repeat of the APEC summit in Manila the previous year, where ten thousand protestors battled police with sticks, stones, and Molotov cocktails, so they designated special demonstration zones to quarantine protestors and assigned riot squads to guard forum sites. The RCMP decided to "allow some access, but definitely not direct access . . . [T]he public has rights, but we're not going to jeopardize the leaders." What made sense to cops, however, seemed irrational to nearly everyone else. Protestors and officials alike regarded the security measures as violations of civil rights. Arrests began early, starting in late September when two students painted a line at UBC to designate an "APEC-free zone." Then three students in October wrote anti-APEC slogans on the windows of University President Martha Piper's new atrium. Further civil rights infringements followed. Those arrested in the lead-up to the forum were asked to sign documents stating they would not return to campus during the forum. Protests then

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[5] Michael Barnholden, *Reading the Riot Act: A Brief History of Riots in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Anvil, 2005), 95; Barnholden, 96.

[6] *Ibid*., 113.

turned violent when demonstrators climbed a wire fence separating a motorcade route. Police moved in, using bicycles as battering rams and pepper-spraying everyone within range. Closer to the motorcade, police pepper-sprayed students before they had time to disperse. Forty arrests followed.[7] In the aftermath, Canada's Prime Minister Jean Chretien likened pepper-spray to flavoring a steak. Like a latter-day Tom Campbell, Chretien made light of the use of violence to maintain order.

One year later, seven hundred people gathered outside the Hyatt in downtown Vancouver to protest Chretien's return for a Liberal Party of Canada fundraiser. Chretien was the keynote speaker, and protestors were still agitated by his remarks about pepper-spray. Police assumed the protest would turn violent. The previous day posters appeared on Commercial Drive advertising a "riot at the Hyatt," suggesting people bring weapons. Protest organizers denounced the posters, but the VPD was understandably anxious, deploying 175 officers to control the hotel space. They again designated a protest zone across from the main entrance. The area directly around the hotel was restricted. At 7:30 p.m. on 8 December 1998, a group of demonstrators broke through the police line and made a run for the lobby entrance. A riot squad stationed inside the hotel then charged into the demonstrators, swinging riot sticks. An RCMP squad waited farther up the street under the command of Staff Sergeant Hughie Stewart, who had overseen the UBC protests the previous year. In a repeat of the Gastown debacle, someone declared an unlawful assembly and ordered protestors to disperse. No one heard the order. The police moved in with riot sticks, a VPD spokesperson later claiming they were forced to act out of fear of losing control. According to reports, contact took the form of shield pushes, baton jabs, and overhand and overhead baton strikes. Injury estimates ranged from four to thirty. The protest fizzled but reassembled later outside the VPD lockup to demand release of arrested protestors. Another riot squad dispersed the crowd. Later reports noted that the police failed to provide "any evidence as to what actions of the crowd were riotous."[8]

As with the hippie demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s, the events surrounding Vancouver's APEC meeting were part of a co-constructed transnational culture of protest and policing, starting earlier than Manila and stretching well into the

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[7] *Ibid*., 115, 117-118.

[8] *Ibid*., 119-22.

twenty-first century. The next chapter unfolded from 30 November to 3 December 1999, when similar anti-globalization demonstrations unfolded in Seattle. Protesting the World Trade Organization (WTO), militant demonstrators tried to block delegates from attending meetings at the Washington State Convention and Trade Center. Students, environmentalists, and workers marched through the streets of the downtown core. The protests started peacefully, but by the end of the first day small bands of self-proclaimed anarchists began to smash windows while the peaceful protestors urged them to stop. Government security forces then turned Seattle into a quasi-police state with regular battles in the streets. The Seattle Police dressed in full riot gear and used tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, and percussion grenades to break up the growing crowds.[9] Later criticism of heavy-handed city and police officials only deepened the sense of déjà vu.

The pattern of police responses to crowds extended beyond politics, however. In 2011, hockey fans violently took to Vancouver's streets after game seven of the 2011 Stanley Cup Finals. Police once again donned riot gear to disperse crowds. Rich Lam immortalized the resulting chaos in an iconic photograph. In the foreground, an officer in riot gear holds a baton and shield. In the background, more officers move towards protestors. In between, a young couple lay in the street kissing as the mayhem unfolds. The woman, Alexandra Thomas, had been knocked to the ground by riot police, and her partner had just leaned down to console her with a kiss. The image went viral, discussed on thousands of websites around the world.[10] Lost in the vignette, however, was the larger moment. Sparked by angry fans and groups seeking an excuse to vandalize, the Stanley Cup Riot of 2011 is thematically different from the other incidents discussed in this study, but the police response was exactly the same. As crowds grew in size, they took on an aura of threat and police responded by exerting force to regain control. The moment captured by Lam was merely a microcosm of the chaos throughout downtown. Fans, hooligans, and observers were caught in crossfire. The police deployed pepper spray, riot sticks, dog squads, and flash bangs throughout the evening. The VPD logged

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[9] Margaret Levi and David Olson, "The Battles in Seattle," *Politics & Society* Vol. 28 No. 3 (2000), 309.

[10] Leslie A. Hahner, "The Riot Kiss: Framing Memes as Visual Argument," *Argumentation and Advocacy* Vol. 49 No. 3 (2013), 152.

nearly 100 arrests; local hospitals treated nearly 150 injured.[11] Reports indicated only a fraction of the crowd had anticipated violence.

What happened on Vancouver's streets is part of a North American history of crowd policing, one that has been paralleled in Canada in both its resort to force and its failure to establish peace. The murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer on 25 May 2020, spurred a wave of spontaneous, multi-racial protests against police violence that spanned the globe. Among the most sustained and conspicuous of these demonstrations was in Portland, Oregon, where protestors took to the streets nightly for nearly a year. The result has been a study in everything wrong with policing approaches to crowd control. They can encapsulate the transnational problems surrounding policing in North America. The Portland Police Bureau's (PBB) fear of losing control led to policies of increased militarization and escalated force, but all this accomplished was exacerbated tensions. Similar to Operation Dustpan tactics, the PBB frequently used the tactic of "kettling"—essentially trapping crowds—to control sections of the city. The tactic only heightened protestors' fury. Internal reviews congratulated the PBB for its practices. External consultants ridiculed these findings. Critics lambasted the use of non-lethal munitions and tear gas—in one instance even gassing the mayor. Inadequate training, poor leadership, sloppy communication, and a pervasive fear of losing control were widely noted problems. Calls for increased oversight, reporting, and training led to voter-approved regulatory reforms in the November 2020 elections.[12]

The study of policing in North America has emphasized the local history of individuals and organizations, but no place is ever unto itself. By comparing the response of constabulary organizations across North America, transnational trends quickly emerge. Across space and time, Canadian and American police forces have mirrored each other's responses to dissent. Police have mobilized under the rhetoric of law-and-order, using force to maintain control over the communities they swear to protect. Although politicians, scholars, and other public figures have worked to distance themselves from their southern neighbor, the common strain of violence in North

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[11] Lindsay, Bethany. "From Bad to Brutal: Timeline of a Riot." British Columbia. CTV News, May 19, 2012. https://bc.ctvnews.ca/from-bad-to-brutal-timeline-of-a-riot-1.658118.

[12] Mike Baker, "After Nearly a Year of Unrest, Portland Leaders Pursue a Crackdown," *New York Times*, 27 April 2021; Maxine Bernstein, "Consultants Blast Bureau's Analysis of Protests," *Portland Oregonian* (4 May 2021).

American policing offers but one example of the transnational connections between the two countries. Additional study of the Vancouver Police Department and RCMP during the 1960s and 1970s could further complicate what has been an overly simple nationalistic distinction. In particular, the VPD's Operation Dustpan remains largely undocumented, emerging only in vague references by the media and scholars. Official documents relating to the operation, it's scope, and results have proved difficult to find. Without those details, the history of Vancouver policing remains sorely incomplete.[13]

The Gastown Riot, with its ice cream sandwiches, mooning, and dramatic violence, bares the central role that moral control played in policing during the 1960s and 1970s. Gastown was not an isolated event, but the culmination of escalating tensions across North America. Nor was the story over after the arrests. The legacy of Love Street and "Grasstown" are still evident. In Kitsilano every year, the Love Street festival pays homage to hippie culture with music, food, and street vendors. In Gastown, visitors to the Woodward's complex are greeted by a massive image of the Gastown Riot. The art installation is meant to remind visitors of Gastown's past, but the former center of countercultural Vancouver has been transformed into a commercial hub, a deliberate remapping of the area by post-riot rezoning. Surrounded by chic cafes and cocktail lounges, the Europe Hotel still stands at the center of Maple Tree Square, but the neighbourhood's four-dimensional history has been collapsed into a two-dimensional mural, a woefully flat reminder of the city's multi-dimensional battle among its citizens.[14]

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[13] Scott W. See, "Nineteenth-Century Collective Violence: Toward a North American Context," *Labour* 39 (Spring 1997), 2.

[14] Shaun Dacey, "The Gastown Riot as Public Art," *Vancouver Tyee* (17 February 2010).

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