

BLACK ROCK MANIFESTO

The Black Rock memorial stone in the traditionally Anglo working class district of Pointe Saint-Charles in Montréal, honoring the 6,000 immigrants that died of typhoid fever in 1847.

Not a Bleeding Heart of Christ or the head of holy fool John the Baptist but a huge black rock like a bad tooth pulled out of the river and placed on the common grave by the working men that built the Victoria Bridge.

They built the bridge, they didn't name it or the city they worked in, living on streets like Duke, Prince, King, Queen, streets that are now parking lots in what was once called Griffintown after John Griffin, Montréal's first slum landlord and like all immigrants they were scared and hoped and prayed that God or luck or the boss would give them a break but like all immigrants they learnt that the only thing to do right or wrong was to kick shit and keep on kicking it until something broke.

And they fought the landlords, the bosses, the politicians, the rich millionaire gangsters posing as gentry on the mountain and then too, the French habitants, starved off their land and moving into Anglo Montreal neighborhoods, taking away Anglo jobs, lowering the wages and level of misery forcing the Anglo workers into a fatal unspoken agreement with the Westmount ruling class that in exchange for acting as sort of unofficial garrison troops, the Anglos would receive preferential treatment in the British-owned companies just like the protestant Orangemen in Northern Ireland.

Yeah keep those peppers down on the farm and Rule Britannia with Griffintown following Westmount into wars that had nothing to do with them, dying for the fuckin British Empire in defence of the divine rights of British Petroleum and then getting hot at the French cause they had enough sense to stay out of that very bad joke called World War One, which started in 1914 and has not stopped since with the good guys becoming the bad guys and the bad guys getting worse.

And Premier Duplessis, the nigger king in smiling photos with the big fat landlord and the big fat cop waving hello to the big fat priest passing by in his long black Lincoln while the blokes and pepper fought in the back alleys of Pointe Saint-Charles, drowning each other below the poverty line with Westmount having its own trouble keeping pushy Jewish parvenus out of their private clubs while an all American boomtime was transforming the whole continent into one big supermarket in accordance with the laws and morals of Mickey Mouse and Joe McCarthy.

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The good life in Fat City with the academics talking about death of ideology and father does know best after all as long as you can keep the Bomb out of your nightmares and meanwhile down home on Rockefeller's Plantation the peppers are watching The Sixty Four Thousand Dollar Question on channel 2 with Duplessis dead as a statue and Rocket Richard retired to Vitalis haircream and the Church like an old movie that everyone has seen too many times and the question being, when do we get our share, *calice*? And fuck the queen anyhow and the kings, bishops, knights and rooks and anybody else that stands in the way of our right to a trailer and a ski-doo.

Boom Boom Boom, FLQ and ski-doo with the Union Jacks disappearing from the city flagpoles as the French workers began placing their full weight behind their new militant unions with the French intellectuals deciding that Oui, maybe it was o.k. to talk joul, *tabarnac*, and the rich Anglos shitting in their tweeds as new nigger king Jean Lesage emerged with the new bilingual policy of the Quiet Revolution which quietly left the working class Anglos behind in their unilingual ghettos to ponder the past glories of the British Empire that was now leaving them to a stiff upper-lip fate in a strange new Québec that was fighting against its third class status as a colony within a colony.

And then the growth of Uncle René and the Parti Québécois in the Seventies triggering off a mass exodus down the 401 of McGill students who didn't need much of an excuse to head out west to where the money is turning green and leaving behind the old, the middle aged middle incomers with tenure and the unemployable poor that have no choice but to stay in the Montréal of the Eighties in a Québec that doesn't officially recognize that there ever was an Anglo working class in this city.

And that's all history and who gives a fuck cause the chances are the Bomb will blow us all to bits anyway, winner, loser, left and right and *route la patate* but anyhow, the Black Rock is still there kind of pushed to the side and stuck in the middle of a narrow traffic islet dividing a two-lane highway leading onto the Victoria Bridge, sitting there like an obscure traffic marker, useless and forgotten by a community that stems from the 6,000 people buried under it, a community that is trapped and feels they have nothing to do but die.

...OR CHANGE...

Anyone walking down Wellington Street on a Friday night can see that there are energies and talents in the Anglo community that haven't been tapped, energy that results in a mutant hero like Buzz Beurling rather than a Norman Bethune because there are no proper outlets just a long series of short circuits that result in the energy eating itself up with the greatest of our poets dying young and proud

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in jails or drinking themselves to death in the uptown bars around Atwater Park.

And dying is easier but some of us shitdisturbers born down there in the Pointe Saint-Charles-Verdun ghetto have decided to form something called the Black Rock Group, basing ourselves on the last hope that what's left of the Anglo community can be salvaged and made useful to itself despite itself and hoping we can help place more weight behind the progressive forces trying to form a Québec that is a colony to no one and belonging to nobody but the people themselves, of themselves and by themselves.

A QUEBEC THAT LETS US LOVE A QUEBEC THAT WON'T TURN US SOUR A QUEBEC THAT DOESN'T KILL ITS POETS

And at least, if nothing else, we'd like to announce that the war is over ... and nobody won.

When I begin to write something that is perhaps what one might loosely deem to be a manifesto—an intention of purpose—a collection of thoughts and things that reflect my class, I have the inclination to surround it with credible ways of thinking—those ways which I have inherited from my middle class education. But I am not Eliot's Prufrock; I have never been or shall I say, we have never been "ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas". We are not your "Hollow Men"—we have been on the front line pissing in our handkerchiefs, holding the Germans back. We have bathed Dieppe in our blood and have come home without jobs. This is not really a complaint. We have learned not to complain. At least, our fathers complained very little. As soon as I completed grade eleven, I was already further ahead than anyone in our family. I was the way out—the Dauphin.

Verdun is simple. We volunteer for everything. Its main arteries that pumped blood into two World Wars are still there. The blood goes now into early pregnancies and the welfare office. We are the Brooklyn of Montréal. We are that place which crawled from the slime of the Black Rock like some crazy Darwinian beast towards the "Northern", towards the C.P.R. We have filled the factories. The Sun Life would have moved a long time ago without us. We are the result of the baby boom which simply means that our fathers were not boomed away in the last War. They had the good fortune of having large fins on their cars and young sons who had to go to University.

My father had four teeth knocked out when he was a kid hopping an oil truck in the winter down near Delormier Street. He had both knees broken in the War and was captured because somebody forgot to tell him that there were fourteen thousand Germans in the town. He has trouble sleeping at night. Nothing changes. Verdun is the same. The English don't punch out the zoot-suiters on

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the boardwalk anymore, but still it's the same.

Rosemont's the same. Working class neighbourhoods are supposed to produce hockey players, not poets or playwrights. Even if there is not a war, we are supposed to high-stick someone anyway. My mother with her coveted Bingo chips and minimum wage. Nothing is supposed to come from us. Certainly not art. We must know what "Moby Dick" means. We must sit in faculty clubs or else flirt with the French culture. At first, it was my intention to talk to you as a friend—as my father might talk to you over a beer, but it occurs to me that you will not understand. It occurs to me that you will classify, categorize, look for a footnote. I give up. This is no longer a statement—this is a threat. Our class shall no longer be your convenience. We, the sons and daughters of those who died on strange beaches so Redpath Crescent would survive, will have our say. I am sorry it is not only the French who threaten you. We shall reverse the disease. We will create in these troubled times. Our class has taught us to tell the truth or we would get a punch in the mouth. Something you would not understand. My grandfather remembered and I remember. He didn't get a double hernia trying to throw a French cop off the Victoria Bridge for nothing. The Black Rock is not the myth of Sisyphus. We have pushed it up the hill and into your factories. It is washed with blood and now it shall be washed with the creative energies of a new generation.

We shall walk backwards and applaud no longer. We shall celebrate ourselves. We will create a forum for our thoughts. We will have it out with you.

Perhaps I can explain it to you a little clearer. Remember in the Sixties when Stan Mikita was in the Forum giving the "high sign" to the entire crowd—well that "high sign" is our sign. We have our colour T.V.'s and sometimes we are quiet. We are "les autres" and don't know why. But we shall create. We shall sing the song of our class and when we tell you to "fuck off", at least it will not be footnoted. It will not be interpreted. It is not lower class language. It is that thing we have learned to say to those in power—to those who refuse to understand. The referee has made a bad call. Stan knows it and we know it.

Danny Adams	Kevin Callahan
David Fennario	Jimmy Sorley
John Salmela	Keith Wilcox
Sheila Salmela	John Bradley
Raymond Filip	Nelson Calder
Martin Bowman	Kevin Germain
Georges Beriault	Linda Arkinson

Verdun, November 1981