

Gentrification and Reform Politics in Montréal, 1982

David Ley and Caroline Mills

Volume 30, Number 81, 1986

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/021816ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/021816ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département de géographie de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0007-9766 (print)

1708-8968 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this note

Ley, D. & Mills, C. (1986). Gentrification and Reform Politics in Montréal, 1982. *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, 30(81), 419–427.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/021816ar>

NOTES

GENTRIFICATION AND REFORM POLITICS IN MONTRÉAL, 1982

by

David LEY and Caroline MILLS

*Department of Geography
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5*

In a recent issue of this journal, Beauregard (1984) presented a wide-ranging cartographic analysis and discussion of several dimensions of the 1982 civic election in Montréal. His paper included an examination of the democratic adequacy of the electoral map, the geography of campaign strategy, and, third, an overview of electoral support for each of the three parties. This short paper is concerned with the third theme, and offers an interpretation of the spatial distribution of the vote for the two opposition parties, the centrist Municipal Action Group (MAG), and more particularly, the leftist Montreal Citizens Movement (MCM). The analysis draws upon both local data and a broader theoretical review of urban reform movements active in Canadian and other cities since 1968, and of a new middle class which is frequently their sponsor.

REFORM POLITICS AND THE NEW MIDDLE CLASS

In seeking to explain Montréal's electoral geography in 1982, Beauregard noted some success for MAG in ethnic districts, while support for MCM was concentrated in certain poor francophone districts, notably Plateau-Mont-Royal, but also in linguistically mixed middle class areas in the west of the city. No consistent associations seem to occur between support for those opposition parties and four variables introduced in the paper: mother tongue, age structure, degree of owner occupancy, and household size. We shall suggest here that a common structure may well underlie electoral behaviour in these apparently diverse districts.

The threefold party grouping in Montréal is reminiscent of similar political configurations in Toronto and Vancouver over much of the past 15 years. In Toronto the reform caucus eventually assumed the formal status of a municipal New Democratic Party with a second group of centrist aldermen; in the 1985 municipal election each group returned six candidates to provide the potential for a bare reform majority on council. In Vancouver a similar municipal reaction against conventional conservative politics emerged in 1968, and various permutations of centre (liberal) and social democratic aldermen have held a majority on council since 1972. Indeed this tripartite

grouping is general enough that Higgins (1981) describes municipal politics in many Canadian cities as including "the old guard, the progressives and the soft middle", a pattern which fits closely the positions of Jean Drapeau's Civic party, the MCM, and MAG in Montréal in 1982. MAG represented the municipal face of the Federal Liberal party and MCM splinter groups; the MCM itself was a sometimes uneasy coalition of reform and leftist groups including NDP supporters (Melamed, 1983; Raboy, 1982).

There are two recurrent features which characterize the reform parties in these cities. First, there is much greater gender equality among candidates than was true of the male-dominated conservatives, and, second, there has been a notable emergence of professionals in their thirties and forties in the reform parties, in contrast to an aging generation of small businessmen in the "old guard". Half of the liberal and social democratic group elected in Toronto in 1985 were women, and the councillors disproportionately claimed a professional occupation. The same is true in Vancouver where new aldermen since 1968 have been dominantly professionals and have included significant numbers of women; over a quarter of members of the Liberal Reform party in the 1970s came from just four professions, while half of their eight aldermen in the 1972 council were university professors (Ley, 1980). Similar profiles emerge in Montréal where the MCM elected the first women councillors to City Hall in 1974 (Melamed, 1983) and in 1982 almost a quarter of MAG aldermanic candidates were also women; a listing of the occupations of the 57 aldermanic candidates in 1982 showed that more than a half of those running for MCM were professionals, while none were businessmen (Beauregard, 1984).

The profile of the young urban professional, both men and women, evokes a broader literature concerning the appearance of a new middle class in western societies, coinciding with the restructuring of the economy toward service employment, and the rapid growth of an educated elite of managerial and professional jobs in the public and private sectors. But to what extent is this new class an attitudinal as well as a statistical unit? Daniel Bell (1980) finds the notion of the new class to be a "muddled concept". The criss-crossing cleavages of economy, politics, and culture do not converge toward a unitary class definition, but instead define a plurality of interests. In contrast, Gouldner (1979) while recognizing the potential fragmentation and political ambivalence of the new class, nonetheless cautiously identifies its bases for unity, and its status as socially and politically progressive. Partitioning the new class certainly makes it simpler to trace the politically progressive elements. Brint (1984) has analysed the liberal tendencies of professionals, while Martin (1981) has observed the diffusion of certain liberal social values of the 1960s counter culture into receptive segments of the middle class, primarily a cultural new class focussed in the arts and such "soft" professions as teaching, the media, welfare services and health care, largely, that is, in public sector employment. Certainly this grouping has been conspicuous in such critical social movements as human rights, the environmental movement, nuclear disarmament, and cultural nationalism in the period since 1965.

There is, moreover, a social geography to the cultural new class. Over the past twenty years it has been concentrating in certain inner districts of large cities, and is often the first wave of a cycle of gentrification in these neighbourhoods, attracted by social and cultural diversity, affordable housing, heritage architecture and environmental amenity, proximity to the place of work, cultural, educational, and other public institutions, and the adult lifestyle of centre city living for households which are small (and often childless) and may well consist of both male and female wage earners (Ley, 1985). A number of studies have conveyed the impression that inner city gentrifiers are political liberals or radicals critical of a conservative status quo. In the United

States gentrifying neighbourhoods such as Society Hill or Fairmount in Philadelphia, the Mission district in San Francisco (Castells, 1983), and inner city precincts of young urban professionals in New Orleans and Atlanta (O'Loughlin, 1980) are more likely to support democratic, liberal, or minority candidates. In London, middle class newcomers have invigorated and sometimes transformed local Labour party politics in inner city boroughs such as Islington. A similar process has been observed in inner areas of Sydney and Melbourne, where the same group has penetrated leadership positions in the Australian Labor party (Mullins, 1982).

In Canada, the period since 1968 has seen the emergence of reform movements and candidates in most of the largest cities. It also coincides with middle class resettlement in the inner city; an index of social status change indicates that more than four times as much middle class movement occurred into inner city areas of the 22 largest metropolitan areas in 1971-81 as during the 1961-71 decade (Ley, 1985). Reform politicians are often professionals who have emerged following an apprenticeship in neighbourhood activism in the inner city; John Sewell in Toronto and Michael Harcourt in Vancouver are two examples, amongst others. A range of social and environmental movements have also come to prominence in gentrifying inner city areas. Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood has been the source both of Greenpeace and Canada's first Green party, while in Toronto, Holdsworth (1983) has matched maps of recent heritage designation, indicative of gentrification, with electoral support for reform politicians. To what extent is the residential geography of the new middle class a principle in organizing the electoral geography of the urban reform movement in Montréal? The profile of a typical supporter suggested by an MCM councillor is informative: "well-educated, 25-45 years old, a professional, probably in the public sector, but not necessarily career-oriented... has other goals instead" (personal communication, June 1984). This supporter, the councillor emphasised, could equally be male or female, anglophone or francophone.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

There is more than one way of examining the relationship between the new middle class and reform politics but the method of simple statistical analysis employed here requires a number of operational definitions to cover gentrification and reform candidates. The easier of the two is a definition of reform politics. Two measures were employed: for each of Montréal's 57 electoral districts in 1982 (see Beauregard, 1984, figure 1) the percentage vote was computed for, first, MCM plus MAG candidates for council and, second, MCM candidates alone. These were labelled REFORM 1 (MCM plus MAG) and REFORM 2 (MCM only).

A more elaborate procedure was employed to measure gentrification. Neighbourhood social change may be assessed either from adjustments in the local housing market or from shifts in the socio-economic profile of households. Both indicators have been employed in the literature, but housing indicators such as price changes or turnover rates can offer ambiguity in interpretation, and present severe problems of data availability in other than small areas. Consequently a more common strategy, and the one employed here, is to use census-based household data. A social status index was computed for each of the 297 census tracts in the city of Montréal in 1971 and 1981; adjustments were made for variations in tract boundaries over the decade. The difference between the social status score for a tract in 1971 and its level in 1981 was taken as a measure of the extent of gentrification which had occurred in that tract over

the decade. Thus gentrification is defined as an upward change of social status in a census tract between 1971 and 1981.

To assess social status itself, both ecological methods like social area analysis or factorial ecology, and social prestige scales typically employ some linear combination of occupational status, income status, and/or educational status. On theoretical grounds, occupational and educational variables were selected and combined. Specifically, a social status score for each census tract is defined as the mean value of the percentage of the work force employed in the quaternary sector (professional, managerial, technical and administrative jobs), plus the percentage of the population with university education. The index performed well when tested for validity against several other variables measuring social status, such as rent and income. The final task was to condense the 297 tracts to the 57 political districts. In a few instances a poor fit necessitated the grouping of the districts themselves to make them compatible with the tracts. As a result the analysis made use of 54 spatial units for which there was data for both the reform votes (REFORM 1, REFORM 2) and the three social status indices, SS71, SS81 and SS81-SS71 (a gentrification index).

GENTRIFICATION AND REFORM POLITICS: SOME INTERRELATIONSHIPS

Correlation analysis between the reform votes and the social status indices shows an informative pattern of interrelationships (table 1). Turning first to the combined vote for both MCM and MAG (REFORM 1), we see that electoral support is closely associated with the social status of political districts, with higher status districts consistently showing higher levels of endorsement. This support is highest (over 70 percent) around the linguistically mixed districts of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and Côte-des-Neiges, and reaches over 60 percent in most of the remaining middle class areas west of downtown, and a clutch of districts around the downtown itself. By and large these areas were already of higher status in 1971 ($r = 0,64$ REFORM 1 vs SS71), though they continued to increase in status through the 1970s ($r = 0,56$ REFORM 1 vs gentrification index), so that by 1981 the relationship had strengthened ($r = 0,71$ REFORM 1 vs SS81). In part this pattern is accountable by the normal tendency for gentrification to proceed in consecutive waves outwards from established high status

Table 1

Correlations of the Reform Vote against Social Status Indices, Montréal, 1982 (n = 54)

	SS71	SS81	SS81-SS71
REFORM 1	0,64	0,71	0,56
REFORM 2	0,28	0,48	0,68

where,

REFORM 1 = 1982 MAG + MCM vote

REFORM 1 = 1982 MCM vote

SS71 = 1971 social status index

SS81 = 1981 social status index

SS81-SS71 = index of gentrification

cores. In Canadian cities more generally, the best predictor of gentrifying tracts in the 1970s was the degree of proximity to 1971 elite areas; for the 216 tracts in Montréal's inner city the correlation was as high as $-0,59$ (Ley, 1985). The infill and expansion of these elite districts (part of the process we call gentrification) has been accompanied by a similar diffusion of votes for reform candidates. It is worth stressing the counter-intuitive nature of this relationship; as social status increases, so does the probability that electors will endorse a reform candidate with liberal or social democratic policies. The inverse of this finding is that support for Jean Drapeau's right wing Civic party is highest in poorer areas. It exceeded 60 percent in several districts in the francophone east end of Montréal, and even higher levels in Saint-Henri (74 percent) and two other adjacent French speaking, working class areas in the south-west of the city.

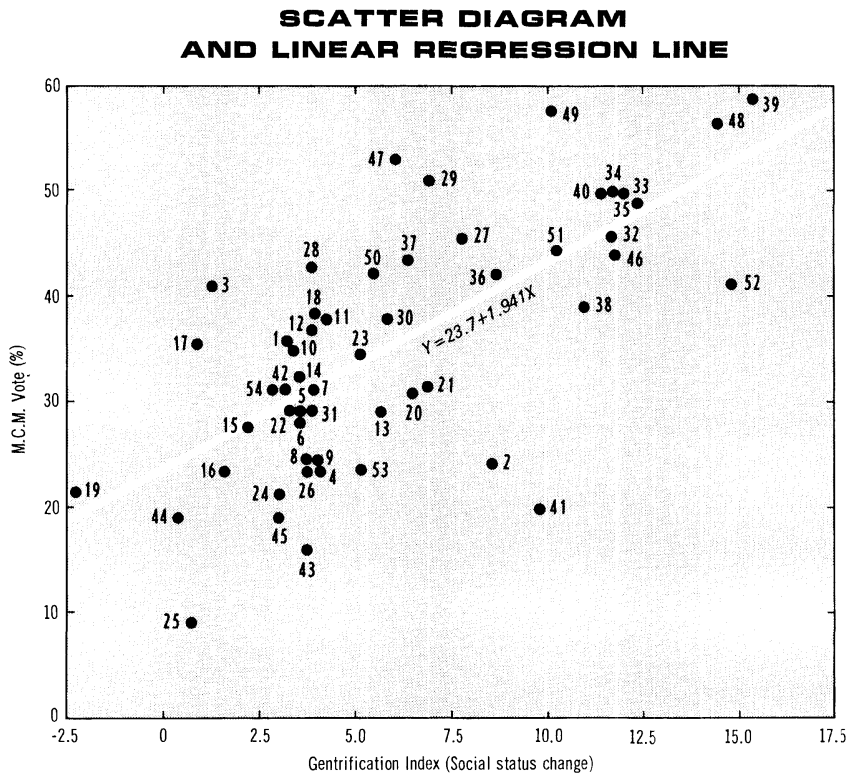
Some interesting variations are introduced by examining the correlates of REFORM 2, the vote for the social democratic policies of the MCM (table 1). The relationship against the 1971 social status of districts weakens appreciably ($r = 0,28$), indicating that while remaining positive, support for MCM candidates is less closely tied to the pre-existing map of social status. However, the correlation strengthens against 1981 social status scores ($r = 0,48$), anticipating a quite robust association between MCM support and the gentrification index ($r = 0,68$). A clear relationship exists, then, between those districts which rose appreciably in social status over the decade and the distribution of electoral support for a social democratic party. Indeed, the correlation is stronger between gentrification and REFORM 2 than it is against REFORM 1 ($0,68$ vs $0,56$). The electorate in gentrifying areas were more likely to endorse MCM than MAG, choosing to throw their support to social democratic rather than to liberal candidates. In short gentrifying areas and the distribution of support for progressive municipal politics were clearly correlated in Montréal's civic election of 1982.

The scatter of observations and a linear regression line describing the relationship appear in figure 1. The diagram hints that a curvilinear function could possibly fit the relationship more closely, but in the absence of a theoretical rationale this exercise was not undertaken. A constellation of points with a low gentrification index of under 5,0 highlight contiguous districts in the east, the north, and the south-west of Montréal where MCM candidates for council did poorly, receiving in general from 15–40 percent of the vote (figure 1). Major negative residuals (25,41) from the regression are electoral districts where MAG candidates performed strongly; in district 41 (Peter McGill) MAG's most eminent candidate, Nick Auf der Maur, took 46 percent of the vote. In contrast are twelve points representing thirteen districts with gentrification scores of 10,0 or over. Seven of these districts are in a compact cluster in Plateau-Mont-Royal and its downtown margins, a region which (with one exception) had low social status scores in 1970, and in 1982 consisted overwhelmingly of tenants who retained a 70 percent francophone plurality. New residents have been moving into this region to take advantage of proximity to downtown, sound, affordable housing, and the character of an old neighbourhood with interesting architecture (Saint-Pierre *et al*, 1985). A consequence has been a rapid inflation of house prices in the past few years. To the west of downtown is a second cluster of six districts including Confédération, Notre-Dame-De-Grâce and Snowdon.

Both these regions generated support of 40–60 percent for MCM candidates despite their differences: the western cluster has a considerable anglophone presence (a 30 percent average), a homeownership rate close to the mean, and in 1971 already the highest social status scores in the city of Montréal. But the underlying structure

Figure 1

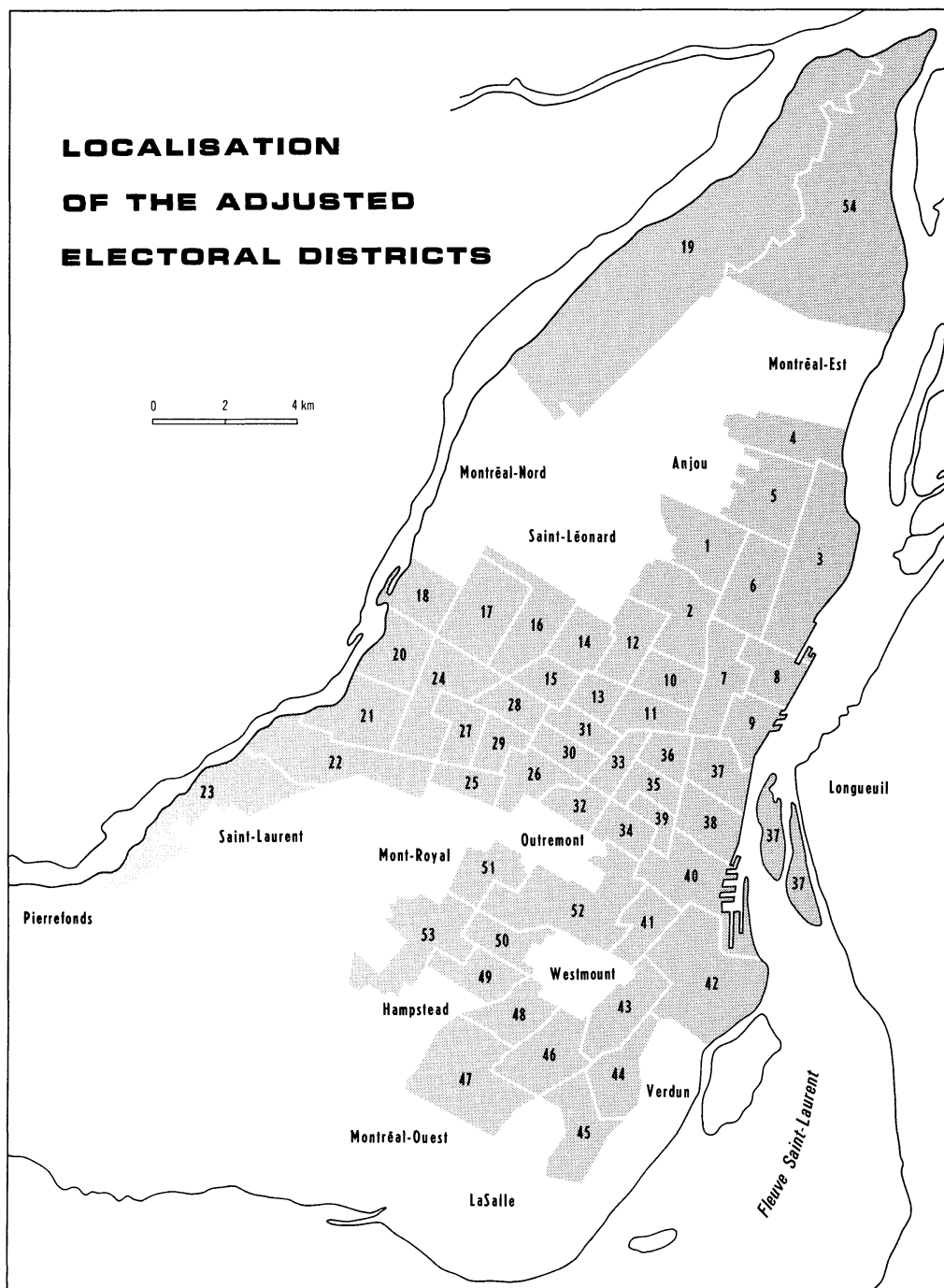
**GENTRIFICATION AND REFORM
POLITICS IN MONTRÉAL, 1982**



ADJUSTED ELECTORAL DISTRICTS IN MONTRÉAL, 1982

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| 1 Louis-Riel | 15 Gabriel-Sagard | 29 Jarry | 43 Saint-Henri |
| 2 Marie-Victorin | 16 Jean-Rivard | 30 Saint-Édouard | 44 Saint-Paul |
| 3 Longue-Pointe | 17 Saint-Michel | 31 Père-Marquette | 45 Émard |
| 4 Tétreaultville | 18 Sault-au-Récollet | 32 Mile-End | 46 Décarie |
| 5 Honoré-Beaugrand | 19 Rivière-des-Prairies | 33 Laurier | 47 Loyola and Confédération |
| 6 Langelier | 20 Fleury | 34 Jeanne-Mance | 48 Notre-Dame-de-Grâce |
| 7 Préfontaine | 21 Ahuntsic | 35 Plateau Mont-Royal | 49 Snowdon |
| 8 Maisonneuve | 22 Acadie | 36 De Lorimier | 50 Côte-des-Neiges |
| 9 Hochelaga | 23 Cartierville | 37 Sainte-Marie | 51 Darlington |
| 10 Bourbonnière | 24 Saint-Sulpice | 38 Saint-Jacques | 52 Mont-Royal |
| 11 Rosemont | 25 Parc-Extension | 39 Saint-Jean-Baptiste | 53 Victoria |
| 12 Étienne-Desmarteau | 26 Jean-Talon | 40 Ville-Marie | 54 Pointe-aux-Trembles,
De La Rousselière
and Bout-de-l'Île |
| 13 Louis-Hébert | 27 Octave-Crémazie | 41 Peter-McGill | |
| 14 François-Perrault | 28 Villerey | 42 Pointe-Saint-Charles | |

LOCALISATION OF THE ADJUSTED ELECTORAL DISTRICTS



which binds these dissimilar regions together is rising social status, the in-migration of a new middle class, in the west a process of infill and contiguous expansion from an established elite core, in the central region a process in part of contiguous expansion from high status Outremont, but also of colonisation by the middle class in a traditional working-class area.

CONCLUSION

Developments in the economy and society of the western nations in the twentieth century have led to the considerable expansion of a cadre of well educated white collar workers in the professions and managerial positions. The theoretical status of this "new middle class" is controversial but a number of authors have identified them (or at least significant sub-groups) with liberal and even social democratic politics. At the municipal level, middle class professionals (in particular) have been closely associated with the gentrification of certain inner city neighbourhoods over the past two decades. To what extent, then, does a theoretical literature on the new middle class suggest an endorsement for municipal reform politics from gentrifying inner city districts? A statistical examination of support for reform parties in Montréal's civic election of 1982 indicates a close relationship. The core area of support for the social democratic party, the Montréal Citizens Movement, coincided with the districts where gentrification, or an upward movement in social status, had been most pronounced in the 1971-81 period. To some degree, it could be argued, Montréal has a unique political culture among Canadian cities (Sancton, 1983), and it is a matter for further research to determine to what extent these results may be generalisable elsewhere.

REFERENCES

- BEAUREGARD, L. (1984) Les élections municipales à Montréal en 1982: une étude de géographie politique. *Cahiers de Géographie du Québec* 28 (75): 395-433.
- BELL, D. (1980) The New Class: A Muddled Concept, in Bell, D. *The Winding Passage*. New York, Basic Books, p. 144-164.
- BRINT, S. (1984) New Class and Cumulative Trend Explanations of the Liberal Political Attitudes of Professionals. *American Journal of Sociology*, 90: 30-71.
- CASTELLS, M. (1983) *The City and the Grassroots*. London, Arnold.
- GOULDNER, A. (1979) *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*. New York, Seabury Press.
- HIGGINS, D. (1981) Progressive City Politics and the Citizen Movement: A Status Report, in Lorimer, J. and MacGregor, C., *After the Developers*. Toronto, James Lorimer, p. 84-95.
- HOLDSWORTH, D. (1983) Appropriating the Past: Heritage Designation and Inner City Revitalization. Paper presented to the Canadian Association of Geographers, Winnipeg.
- LEY, D. (1980) Liberal Ideology and the Post-Industrial City. *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, 70: 238-258.
- LEY, D. (1985) *Gentrification in Canadian Inner Cities: Patterns, Analysis, Impacts and Policy*. Ottawa, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.
- MARTIN, B. (1981) *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change*. Oxford, Blackwell.
- MELAMED, A. (1983) Montreal: MCM Comes of Age. *City Magazine*, 6: 21-26.
- MULLINS, P. (1982) The "Middle Class" and the Inner City. *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 11: 44-58.
- O'LOUGHLIN, J. (1980) The Election of Black Mayors, 1977. *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, 70: 353-70.
- RABOY, M. (1982) The Future of Montreal and the MCM, in Roussopoulos, D., ed. *The City and Radical Social Change*. Montréal, Black Star Books, p. 235-259.

- SAINT-PIERRE, J., CHAU, T. and CHOKO, M. (1985) *Impact de la restauration dans les quartiers centraux de Montréal*. Montréal, UQAM, Laboratoire de recherche en sciences immobilières.
- SANCTON, A. (1983) Montreal, in Magnusson, W. and Sancton, A., ed. *City Politics in Canada*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, p. 58-93.

(acceptation définitive en septembre 1986)

CARTOGRAPHIE

Conception : Isabelle DIAZ, Louise MARCOTTE

Réalisation : Isabelle DIAZ

Photographie : Serge DUCHESNEAU