

James Egan Story (1996) by filmmaker David Adkin.

In 2002 urban lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth tend to take for granted queer magazines like *Xtra West*, rainbow flags, the *Queer as Folk* TV series, Dykes on Bikes at Pride events, Toronto's Pussy Palace (women's night at the steambath), the Pink Pages (telephone directory), and queer studies in colleges and universities. Less concerned about the right to marry than the schedule for Vancouver's annual "Out on Screen" queer film festival, youth might be quick to discount the

efforts of a White, gay, high school dropout named James Egan who dared to disrupt the profoundly anti-homosexual ideology of religious leaders, psychiatrists, journalists, and cops more than half a century ago. Yet by dismissing or forgetting James Egan's contributions, we perilously ignore a chunk of the foundation upon which we stand. To me, Egan's extraordinary belief in the power of homo self-acceptance and equality rights for all makes him a queer hero, worthy of remembrance.

*Blueprint:
Black British Columbian Literature and Culture*

Edited by Wayde Compton

Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001. 315 pp. Illus. \$24.95 paper.

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THIS IS AN EXTREMELY important collection and is well served by its editor, Wayde Compton. The title itself, with its pun on both "blueprint" and the "Blues" (that defining art form for the Black diaspora) avoids any easy essentialist gestures, as is illustrated by the following statement at the end of Compton's introduction: "Much of the uniqueness of the work in this anthology is exactly the result of the shifting patterns of migration and the absence of a sharply defined regional tradition. If an aesthetic is in development, it may be best to view it – from the ground floor – as provisional rather than as a progression towards an essence" (37).

When I first arrived in Vancouver in 1995 and was familiarizing myself with the extent of the presence of different cultures in the city, I was often told that, unlike eastern Canada, here there was a dearth of Black people and that this appeared to have been the case throughout the history of British Columbia. *Blueprint* effectively challenges this perception.

The collection begins with the controversial figure of James Douglas, sympathetically situating his writings and his dilemma (in relation to the acknowledgment of his "blackness") within the ideologies of his times. As Compton expresses it in his own poem "JD" at the end of the book (272):

O James Douglas,
 Our own quadroon Moses,
 Should I place a violet on your grave
 Or hawk a little spit
 For your betraying ways?
 O white man, black when out
 Of favour ...

The collection also evokes the fluctuating histories and circumstances of British Columbia's Black residents. In Compton's words:

From the time of the first arrivals in the nineteenth century, BC's black history has been one of continuous exodus, immigration, settlement, exploration, desertion, miscegenation, communitarianism, integration, segregation, agitation, uprooting and re-rooting and re-routing ... If there is a unifying characteristic of black identity in this province, it is surely the talent for reinvention and for pioneering new versions of traditional identities that such conditions demand. (20)

As befits its stated intention of paying respect to the orature at the heart of Black cultures everywhere, the anthology comprises an eclectic mix of genres, ranging from letters and journals to oral histories (for example, relying heavily on the collection of oral accounts collected by Daphne Marlatt and Caroline Itter in *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End* (Victoria: Aural History Program, 1979)). As readers would expect, the anatomy of racism is a prevailing motif, and one notes the reiteration of distinctions made between the versions that proliferate in the United States and Canada as exemplified in Dorothy Nealy's extract: "In the United States, the Americans are so blatant about the racial prejudice. You can fight it, because they call you

'nigger' and they segregate you out loud and clear. But the racism in Canada is so subtle, and so elusive, you can't really pin it down" (116). In the contemporary period one is constantly struck by the performative nature of many of the offerings. There is always the sound of a distinctive voice, as in the poetry of Mercedes Baines: "I push through the sea of white eyes staring at / me on the bus / as if I were some strange fruit / as if my vulva was hanging outside of my skirt whispering exotic / welcomes" (213); or of Nikola Marin, "Was it wolf or coyote who mounted me? She was the chicken I wanted to steal by night / He is Eshu. He is primal energy. He is trickster. Some people call him the Devil" (261); or the extract from David Odhiambo's *diss/ed banded nation*, "he's swept into a heavy crush of the doped hastening towards fetid warehouse parties – raves – n' line-ups in front of hot nightclubs; others nosing to cinemas or restaurants or returning from lectures about the exotic n' obscure" (233).

Wayde Compton has expressed the hope that the publication of *Bluesprint* will initiate a dialogue and generate a more informed debate around the history of the Black presence in British Columbia. The occasion was a symposium at Green College (University of British Columbia) in which Compton, together with Kevin McNeilly, was interviewing George Elliott Clarke, himself one of the pioneers of Black literature in Canada. Judging from the ubiquity of *Bluesprint* in bookstores across Vancouver, and the fact that there were enthusiastic reviews in the *Georgia Straight* as well as a centre-page spread in the Spring issue (2002) of *BC Bookworld*, one hopes that his desire will be fulfilled and that the book will reach those beyond the academic world. Indeed, one hopes

that this collection will help to overcome the usual rifts in communication that divide the academic world from the general public. The distinctive contributions of British Columbia's

Black residents certainly deserves wider recognition, and it has its eloquent testimony in this dynamic collection.

*NFB Kids: Portrayals of Children
by the National Film Board of Canada, 1939-1989*

Brian J. Low

Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002.
288 pp. Illus. \$29.95 paper.

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IS THERE A CANADIAN BOOMER alive who cannot recall those school days when the Bell and Howell 16 mm. projector came out and earnest documentary films about salmon fishing in British Columbia, wheat farming in Saskatchewan, and fruit growing in the Niagara were shown? Through the efforts of classroom teachers, ever grateful for classroom resources of any kind that might hold the interest of students, the National Film Board (NFB) has been a ubiquitous presence in the lives of Canadian children. Now Brian Low convincingly demonstrates that the NFB, for its part, had a deep and abiding interest in children.

The film collection housed in the NFB Archives is clearly a very rich source for social historians and, if nothing else, *NFB Kids* serves to highlight this fact. In an impressive display of research, Low viewed 250 films that contain substantial portrayals of children and that, over a fifty-year period, have provided evidence of "transitions in ... imagery and

narrative" (2). He argues that three different, though overlapping, approaches to children can be found in NFB films but that, in all cases, the purpose was to promote "practices and principles expected by childhood experts to produce desirable outcomes" (16).

In the earliest period, 1939 to 1946, when John Grierson was in charge of the NFB, films were geared towards the goals of progressivism. The need for improvements in the conditions of rural education and an emphasis on cooperative group efforts to enhance community life were central themes. Young people, under the suggestion and direction of adults, were portrayed as learning about, implementing, and benefiting from cooperative team projects of various kinds.

Within this context, readers of *BC Studies* will be interested in the chapter that describes how the children of Lantzville on Vancouver Island became participants in the 1944 film, *Lessons in Living*. Designed to promote the acceptance of an activity-based pedagogy leading to acts of social