

BOOK REVIEWS

*Race and the City: Chinese
Canadian and Chinese American
Political Mobilization*

Shanti Fernando

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006.
173 pp. \$29.95 paper.

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Race and the City approaches racism, politics, and space through a comparative case study of two umbrella ethno-cultural community organizations, one in Toronto and one in Los Angeles. Drawing from interviews with key individuals employed with member groups in both cities, Fernando paints in broad strokes the ethnic politics of Chinese Canadian/American communities. Interviews with selected spokespersons from ethnic Chinese organizations, media accounts, and secondary literature illuminate racialized political mobilization and civic engagement. Fernando's thesis is that ethno-specific, community-based organizations are democratic organizations that buffer the effects of systemic racism in both countries.

Race and the City uses a creative methodology for expanding our understanding of political participation by examining cross-city comparisons of ethnic organizations and their struggles against systemic racism. However, to follow the logic of Fernando's arguments, readers must be prepared to accept her assertions that systemic racism forms a barrier to greater political participation in formal politics on the part of Chinese-Canadian and Chinese-American individuals and groups. She argues that, excluded from conventional politics, Chinese community-based organizations offer a parallel political "universe" where political skills and practices can be honed in the fight against racism and then transposed to formal mainstream politics. But because researchers do not traditionally view participation in anti-racist activism as political engagement in formal democratic processes, Fernando also wants to redefine political participation to include ethnocultural community organizations' struggles against systemic racism.

Readers should not expect micro-level, rich ethnographic descriptions of internal community politics or archival histories and insider information drawn from private written documents. Nor

does Fernando adopt the stance of cultural geographers such as Kay Anderson (1991), S. Hassan and D. Ley (1994), and David Lai (1988), or historian Wing Chung Ng (1999), who problematize the Chineseness of place in the politics of racialization. Fernando largely assumes ethnic Chinese spatiality in the two cities as a container for racial politics. We learn little about how such clusters emerged historically, how neighbourhood boundaries are contested and maintained, or how specific internal and external political struggles, tactics, and strategies transpire, under what conditions, and according to whom.

I am generally sympathetic to Fernando's arguments. Yet, having spent much of my formative adult years in Chinatown politics, I found that, at times, *Race and the City* tends to over-generalize and essentialize Chinese-Canadian-ness and Chinese-American-ness, particularly when calling for pan-Chinese/Asian ethnic mobilization as a necessary next stage in ethnic political participation and mobilization. In my view, the book fails to make this case largely because it idealizes community coalitions. In reality, those of Chinese ancestry may share little beyond an enjoyment of food and family. As members of a vastly dispersed and complex diaspora, Chinese communities in Canada and the United States exhibit a broad range of ideological positions, languages, religions, and regional and national identifications, among other points of difference. Consequently, these communities contain a multiplicity of self-help organizations.

Fernando's three-way typology of Chinese ethnic cultural organizations – survival and adjustment groups, civic and political development groups, advocacy and civil rights groups – is based on a limited pool of organizations

that are members of community-based umbrella organizations in the two cities. The typology is narrow and unidimensional. It leaves out Chinese ethnic groups that are not members, that may operate on other political terrain, and whose source of political identity may go beyond their “Chineseness” as defined by otherness in a multicultural framing. Indeed, in terms of political participation in formal politics, it may actually be counter-productive to build coalitions based on a single political agenda of combatting racism, especially when manifestations of racism are known to be malleable, fluid, and adaptive to changing conditions and co-generated through intersections with other socially produced and contested categories of identity such as gender, class, citizenship, and sexualities.

Fernando offers interesting evidence, and her speculative, normative, and prescriptive assessments are worth pondering; but, ultimately, *Race and the City* left me hungry for more. Others may want to further explore her comparative methodology for understanding ethno-specific political participation and its implications for advancing urban, ethnic, and community-based anti-racism studies.

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*Yi Fao: Speaking through
Memory: A History of
New Westminster's Chinese
Community, 1858-1980*

Jim Wolf and Patricia Owen

Surrey: Heritage House Publishing,
2008. 144 pp. Illus. \$19.95 paper.

*Hiroshima Immigrants in
Canada, 1891-1941*

Michiko Midge Ayukawa

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.
208 pp. Illus., maps. \$24.95 paper.

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IN 1998, PATRICIA E. ROY reviewed several books in which Chinese- and Japanese-Canadians combined archival projects and oral history to tell “their own history.” She praised these “active voices” but called for more research on childhood and more “analyses of class, gender, and generation relations.” Jim Wolf and Patricia Owen, in *Yi Fao: Speaking through Memory: A History of New Westminster's Chinese Community, 1858-1980*, and Michiko Midge Ayukawa, in *Hiroshima Immigrants in Canada, 1891-1941*, answer Roy's call. Their books make significant contributions to the histories of those communities in British Columbia and serve as models for future projects.

Preparation for a museum exhibit on Chinese immigration for the New Westminster Museum and Archives led Jim Wolf, a heritage planner, and Patricia Owen, a curator, to interview members of the Law, Lee,

Quan, and Shiu families and to write *Yi Fao*. Their text and photographs give voice to three generations of these families, descendants of the merchants, contractors, labourers, and farmers who settled at “Yi Fao,” or the “Second Port City” after Victoria. The community and its organizations grew amidst the racism of the surrounding society. Some men brought wives and established families. Immigration restrictions, particularly between 1923 and 1947, along with economic changes, meant that Yi Fao's population declined. By 1979, families and their businesses had integrated into local neighbourhoods and most of the Yi Fao buildings were gone.

The community lived on in memories as “a place ... where people banded together to support one another in the new country” (135). For example, during the Depression, widowed See Quan supported her family by working at various jobs. She also organized other mothers to hire Reverend C.C. Shiu as a teacher for a Chinese language school (99). The children brought together there after public school classes formed friendships that eased generational tensions at home and racist restrictions in the larger society.

In researching Hiroshima immigrants in Canada, Midge Ayukawa explores themes similar to those addressed by Wolf and Owen with regard to Chinese immigrants in New Westminster; however, in several areas she goes further than they do. As a child of Hiroshima immigrants living in Vancouver in the 1930s, she knew the Japanese-Canadian community as an “insider” before the events of the Second World War destroyed it. Years later, after a career as a scientist, she visited Japan and was inspired to research the context of her family's migration. She returned to university to study history.

¹ Patricia E. Roy, *BC Studies* 117 (Spring 1998): 51, 60.

For *Hiroshima Immigrants* Ayukawa draws on eighty interviews that focus on life in the Hiroshima homeland and a range of experiences in British Columbia: mining at Cumberland, farming in the Fraser Valley and the Okanagan Valley, labouring in company towns, and running businesses in Vancouver. She builds on her academic publications on Japanese immigrant women to recount the efforts these women made to support their families.

Ayukawa argues that the *Nisei* (second-generation immigrants) faced their own challenges. First-generation immigrants (the *Issei*) held varied views on assimilation, but most believed that, in a racially restricted labour market, Japanese-language skills were necessary for getting jobs with Japanese-speaking bosses. Many parents pressured the *Nisei* to attend Japanese-language classes after school, thus limiting their participation in extracurricular activities such as sports. Some *Nisei* “developed their own particular subculture” (110-11).

Ayukawa’s ability to link such findings regarding Hiroshima immigrants to academic literature indicates directions for future studies of Asian immigration in British Columbia.



The Ker Family of Victoria, 1859-1976: Pioneer Industrialists in Western Canada

John Adams

Vancouver: Holte Publishing, 2007.
309 pp. \$19.95 paper.

JAMIE MORTON
North Island College

APPROACHED BY David Nation
AKer to document the history of his family in British Columbia since Robert Ker’s arrival in 1859, John Adams has produced an engaging narrative, principally focused on the lives and careers of Robert (1824-79), his son David (1862-1923), and his grandson Robbie (1895-1976). Inherent to such a study is the need to balance two considerations: the expectations of the family (or client) and the opportunity to examine larger historical themes. Family expectations often encourage an “inside,” family-centred perspective, recording and celebrating the actions and interactions of individual family members. On the other hand, by locating family members and their actions within a broader structural context, larger historical themes, such as the economic and social development of British Columbia, can be illustrated. Overall, this book seems to privilege the first approach, providing a close look at the personal and business lives of these members of the Ker family. Adams does invoke some of the larger structural themes – including gold rush immigration, the political evolution of British Columbia, and the socio-economic impacts of the second Industrial Revolution and the Prairie wheat boom – but primarily to frame the actions of family members rather than to explain them.

The narrative is supported by a wealth of sources, beginning with two substantial collections of Ker family papers donated to the BC Archives in the 1970s. These are augmented by a variety of other materials, including newspaper articles, documents in the family's possession, and interviews with family members. The availability and richness of sources and access to the family provide a high level of specific detail, a primary strength of the book. At times this high level of family-specific detail works against locating the "inside" narrative within the larger historical context – the trees obscuring the forest. For example, the first chapter deals at greater length with the "illustrious past" of the Ker family in Scotland than with Robert's life leading up to his emigration. While the family's antecedents are of genealogical interest, particularly to descendants, of more interest to the study of British Columbia is what factors precipitated Robert's emigration. How did the intersection of his family background, social position, and training and vocation as a merchant contribute to this decision?

Chapters 4 to 8 describe the life and career of Robert's son David, who was primarily associated with the grain milling firm of Brackman and Ker. Adams offers a detailed description of David's personal and professional life, although at times the reader may wish for more contextual information. Although the linkages within the Victoria commercial community are mentioned, it is not made clear how these, combined with structural factors such as the pre-First World War economic boom, contributed to the formation and success of B&K. This emphasis on the individual rather than on the historical context or structures continues in Chapter 8,

which discusses pre-First World War civic boosterism in Victoria. Rather than locating David Ker as one member of an active promotional group among the commercial elite of Victoria, Adams presents his involvement in the Board of Trade, and in the Empress Hotel and Royal Theatre projects, in a way that particularizes his actions.

Chapters 9 to 14 deal mostly with David's son Robbie Ker, with a detailed description of his life and career. The story is an engaging one, with the young Robbie sent off to school in England, then joining the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War before starting his own successful business career. As biography, the story is effective, and in places it raises opportunities to develop some of the larger themes. How representative was Robbie's experience, at school, at war, and in business, compared to that of other sons of wealthy BC families of his generation?

Evaluated as it seems to be intended – as a family-initiated collective biography – the book succeeds in presenting the story of the BC branch of the Ker family over the last 150 years, with particular attention on Robert, David, and Robbie Ker. It is clearly organized, well documented, accurate, and readable, although at times the level of detail can challenge the clarity of the narrative. With its strong sources and high level of detail, the book should prove a useful guide to some linkages between members of the commercial and social elites of British Columbia: many names familiar in BC history appear as business and social associates of the Ker family.

To meet the apparent mandate of the book, Adams has focused on the "inside" stories specific to the Ker family, emphasizing the agency of individual members – how they shaped themselves and the family. The history

of British Columbia over the past 150 years provides a framing device for this narrative rather than serving as a central explanatory factor. For the reader, the specific detail makes for an engaging and useful microstudy of the family, although at times one might wish for a broader perspective, locating the “inside” story more explicitly in the larger narrative of Victoria and British Columbia. For the student of BC history, more emphasis on context may have made for a more powerful study by acknowledging and incorporating the ways in which distinctive structural factors found in the province acted to shape the Ker family.

*Red Light Neon: A History of
Vancouver's Sex Trade*

Daniel Francis

Vancouver: Subway Books, 2006.
192 pp. \$22.00 paper.

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PROSTITUTION IS A complex and politically charged issue that defies simple analysis. Daniel Francis's new book documents attempts to regulate the sex industry in Vancouver, a city where the subject has occupied a central place in public discourses for over a century. The story begins in 1873. Francis represents pre-First World War Vancouver as a multiracial frontier society where madams with business acumen ran flourishing brothels alongside bars, hotels, and opium and gambling houses. The interwar period was marked by the rise of a criminal underworld, corruption scandals involving city council and the police force, and anti-vice campaigns that

focused on prostitution. Francis argues that the criminalization of prostitution stigmatizes sex workers and excludes prostitutes from mainstream society and, thus, from legal and political protection. These effects result in their disproportionate vulnerability to violence and murder, particularly when they are forced to work outside, on the street. He marks the closing of the infamous Penthouse Club in 1975 as the event that “caused an increase in the number of women on the street, which led to the muddled attempts in the 1980s to clean up the West End, and led, as well, indirectly, to the tragedy of the Missing Women” (8).

Red Light Neon's narrative anchors contemporary debates in historical origins. For example, Francis describes similarities between moral panics about “white slavery” in the early years of the twentieth century and current concerns about “human trafficking.” He offers an account of hypocritical posturing by politicians who have both exploited and abhorred prostitution, and outlines ongoing tensions between choice and coercion as explanations for why women and men may engage in commercial sex work. Francis's central argument can be represented by two quotes. First: “There have always been violent men taking advantage of women who work the streets, but never with such frequency as now. It is impossible to believe that the cause is anything other than misguided public policy” (132). The problem, so defined, leads Francis to a solution: “In my view, what they need is not pity but sensible public policies that allow them to exit the industry if they wish or to carry on their business in safety if they do not” (11).

Like any history of the present, Francis's narrative includes some voices and excludes others, selects some evidence and ignores other

evidence, and asserts logical and causal connections between some forces and processes while effecting a disconnection between others. The book marshalls evidence to support contemporary campaigns that support “decriminalization” or “legalization” and that oppose the “abolition” of prostitution. While Francis outlines the complexities of these three positions, he repeats the error of omission for which the decriminalization/legalization advocates he supports have been repeatedly criticized: he offers no serious consideration of the particular relationship between Aboriginal women and children and the BC sex industry. Francis is careful to differentiate between indoor and high-track sex work, on the one hand, and outdoor, street-based “survival sex work” (131), on the other. He *states* that Aboriginal women and children constitute a significant majority of the persons employed and exploited, historically and contemporarily, on the lowest echelons of Vancouver’s sex industry and of those counted among the “Missing Women” (145). However, he fails to *analyze* what the implications of this classed and racialized difference might be for the argument he puts forward. I would encourage readers to consult the Aboriginal Women’s Association of Canada (AWAN) website (<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/racism.html>) for one statement of such a critique.

There is no single voice or single position that represents the heterogeneous category “Aboriginal women and children,” any more than once voice speaks for all “sex workers.” However, it is the case that Aboriginal women and children will be significantly and distinctly affected by any policy change in this area, and this fact alone should suffice for their analyses to be

central to public debate – a “fourth” position, perhaps. Furthermore, as is the case regarding so many other issues in Canada, Aboriginal perspectives may offer more sophisticated thinking and stimulate more incisive public debate than that currently circulating, and they may inspire us all to imagine alternative possibilities and to construct futures not entirely determined by the supply and demand logic of the free market or the celebration of the atomistic “choice-making” neoliberal individual.

Red Light Neon is well written. The language is clear and accessible, and the narrative is well crafted; problems are succinctly though narrowly defined, and solutions potentially achievable within the pragmatics of the status quo are persuasively argued. However, Francis’s rhetoric of certainty, conveyed by absolutist language, leaves no opening for dialogue or for the admission of voices hitherto excluded from debate. An implicit assumption that the historical “facts” that make up his narrative are singular and incontrovertible permeates this firmly closed text. *Red Light Neon* is a quick read, a straightforward map with easy-to-follow directions – a place to start, but not to end.



*Myra's Men: Building the
Kettle Valley Railway,
Myra Canyon to Penticton*

Maurice Williams

Kelowna: Myra Canyon Trestle
Restoration Society, 2008.
168 pp \$20.00 paper.

FRANK LEONARD
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IN AUGUST 2003, the Okanagan Mountain Park fire southeast of Kelowna destroyed or damaged the Myra Canyon trestles, eighteen railroad structures, and the roadbed between them. This 5.5 kilometre high level path around a mountainous amphitheatre had long been regarded as an engineering marvel and, as part of the Trans Canada Trail, was fast becoming a major tourist attraction. To commemorate the restoration and reopening of the site less than five years after the disaster, the Myra Canyon Trestle Restoration Society commissioned historian Maurice Williams to write an account of the original construction of that section of the Kettle Valley Railway (KVR), a subsidiary of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), of which the canyon line was a part. In *Myra's Men* a series of indispensable maps orients new trekkers to the site, and dozens of clearly captioned contemporary photographs of the construction process will intrigue them after they leave the trail. But the thoughtful narrative of some of the challenges of building and living on the road that anchors these elements makes the book more than a helpful souvenir.

The book's main title reflects Williams's primary interest in the labour relations that construction generated, but the author also deploys

two important sources – namely, company engineering reports and correspondence between the KVR manager and CPR headquarters in Montreal – to present briefer accounts of two other topics: locating the line and building it. Data drawn from these sources have been rearranged in a series of lists: trestle and tunnel designation and completion; track-laying dates; workforce totals, both in Myra Canyon and the longer section; deaths by accident; and rosters of subcontractors and the resident engineers. These items alone will attract academic specialists.

Both topics deserve more, of course. In his classic text on railway location, A.M. Wellington declares that “economics is all there is to it.” A cost comparison, even if simplified, would illuminate just why KVR chief engineer Andrew McCullough chose the route that included the trestles and bypassed Kelowna in favour of an initial lower route, which, even if longer, reduced the gradient and approached the Okanagan farming community. Why did estimates of first cost (construction alone) apparently trump estimates of traffic and operating costs in this decision?

Unfortunately, only a handful of images in the book concern site preparation and the actual assembly of the original trestles in Myra Canyon. While few other photographs of this sequence may survive, the addition of an image of the engineering profile of a small trestle juxtaposed with that of the largest structure (Trestle 6 – Pooley Creek) would have given readers a better indication of the scale and the complexity of building. Inclusion of several images of the sequence of construction of the replacement structures, clearly noted as such, would have illustrated some steps that are lacking in the original photos.

Perhaps because even the partial documentation of a railway under construction is so rich, this work is content to describe a world on its own – a kind of KVR exceptionalism. That the building of the KVR overlapped with the completion of the BC legs of the two new transcontinentals, the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) and the Canadian Northern (CN), as well as the beginning of the Pacific Great Eastern (PGE), invites comparison of labour relations. Excerpts from testimony to the BC Royal Commission on Labour concerning the working conditions of navvies certainly illustrate and reinforce Williams's conclusion that contractors "exploited them, [sub-contractors] paid them minimally, [and] the BC government ignored them" (135). But what was the level of profit for the exploiters? It appears that the principal contractor and the major subcontractor that built much of the line in Myra Canyon did not make returns on the scale that hobbled the operation of the GTP and that looted the PGE. An examination of the records of the lawsuit of the principal contractor against the KVR (46-47n) might illuminate how the CPR was more vigilant than the Canadian and BC governments in financing railway construction.

Perhaps the most dramatic act of resistance to exploitation on this section of the KVR was a strike in May 1913 led by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Williams suggests that this action did not impede construction as IWW strikes on the CN and the GTP had done in 1912, but his reliance on local and IWW newspapers for details of the strike obscures the reasons for its failure. Did the KVR pay rates lead blanket stiffers to tramp from the GTP or the CN? Certainly IWW organizers such as Thorne (130) had been involved

in both earlier conflicts. A troll through labour commission testimony should provide some data for comparison. Did the slump of 1913 increase the labour supply of the KVR and thus make both Wobbly promises and turning away from wages, however inadequate, less attractive? Provincial Police reports on agitation and the strike might offer answers.

The points above simply build on Williams's interesting work. It deserves not only to be purchased by trekkers and cyclists but also to be reflected upon by scholars.

*Spirit in the Grass: The Cariboo
Chilcotin's Forgotten Landscape*

Chris Harris

105 Mile Ranch: Country Light

Publishing, 2007. 224 pp.

\$39.95 paper.

MARIE ELLIOTT

Victoria

IT IS SAID THAT, in the old days, you could hear the commotion at Becher's place as soon as your horse crested the rim of the Prairie. The old stopping house and saloon are gone now, but on the western slope a few of its patrons lie buried in the white picketed cemetery, surrounded by bunchgrass and pine trees. Bunchgrass – bluebunch wheatgrass, short-awned porcupine grass, and spreading needlegrass – brought cattle and cowboys to Becher's Prairie in the first place. A few miles south, on the Fraser River benches, Jerome and Thaddeus Harper took up thirty thousand acres of it and ran 2,200 cattle in the late 1800s.

Among the fourteen biogeoclimatic, or ecological, zones in British

Columbia, the Bunchgrass zone is one of the smallest, covering less than one percent of the province. Also known as the Inter-Mountain Grassland Ecosystem, it flows southward from Becher's Prairie through the Chilcotin, Fraser, and Thompson river valleys into the Okanagan, eastern Washington, Oregon, and western Idaho. For thousands of years First Nations peoples hunted, fished, and gathered plants for food and medicinal purposes in this region. They utilized willow and hemp to make baskets and fishing nets, and created semi-permanent pit dwellings in the friable soil along the riverbanks. The Hudson's Bay Company relied on bunchgrass to support fur brigades of two hundred horses or more travelling from Fort Alexandria to the Columbia River and back. In the 1860s, the grasslands were still thriving when drovers brought in herds of beef cattle from Oregon and Washington Territory to feed thousands of miners during the Cariboo gold rush.

Urban development, agriculture, large orchards, and vineyards have claimed most of the Thompson and Okanagan grasslands over the last one hundred years, but 95 percent of the lesser known Cariboo-Chilcotin grasslands remains intact. Recent literature on the natural history of the province provides some information. Biologist Richard Cannings and zoologist Sydney Cannings co-authored the award-winning *British Columbia: A Natural History*, 2nd ed. (2004) and *The BC Roadside Naturalist* (2002). But a regional perspective was needed, and the Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving, protecting, and promoting the grasslands of British Columbia, encouraged Chris Harris to publish *Spirit in the Grass: The Cariboo Chilcotin's*

Forgotten Landscape. Other Cariboo residents who contributed include research ecologist Ordell Steen and plant ecologist Kristi Iverson, who provide an excellent overview of present and endangered species. Harold Rhenisch examines the cultural history in prose and poetry. It is fitting that *Spirit in the Grass* is dedicated to Anna Roberts of Williams Lake, who has given so much of her time and knowledge to the preservation of the Cariboo-Chilcotin's natural history.

We learn that there are three zones in the grasslands, depending on altitude: lower, middle, and upper, each with its own special flora and fauna. Summer temperatures in the Lower Zone are hot enough to raise cantaloupe and watermelons outdoors, and, in the dry areas, prickly cactus abound. Bunchgrass proliferates in the Middle Zone, but in the Upper Zone pine and fir trees, no longer kept in check by frequent fires, encroach upon the open spaces. While bunchgrass may be tough plants, the silt and loam soil they prefer is constantly eroding into the creeks and rivers. All-terrain vehicles, dirt bikes, and mountain bikes can easily cause further desecration.

No one interprets the Cariboo-Chilcotin landscape like Chris Harris. He knows every mountain and valley, from the Bowron Lakes to Bella Coola. A professional photographer, he patiently works with prevailing light and shadows to capture nature in its finest moments. In this book, he has more than achieved his goal, which is "to make images of the rolling hills and subtle pastel colours that would be impossible to forget" (39). His lush panoramas, spreading across two pages, invite you to peer down into the turquoise oxbows of the Chilcotin River, follow a deer trail on the beige-coloured bunchgrass hills, or venture into a

golden aspen grove in late September. The spare but elegant photographs of short-lived spring flowers (balsamroot, saskatoon, sagebrush buttercup) and the birds of the grasslands (the endangered avocet and Lewis's woodpecker, sharp-tailed grouse, lazuli bunting, and sandhill crane) balance the magnificent landscapes.

Although one percent of British Columbia does not sound impressive, the Bunchgrass zone protects one-third of the province's "known threatened and vulnerable plant and animal species" (12). Because of its isolated location and large ranch holdings, the Cariboo-Chilcotin grasslands have avoided intense development, but to date only two areas have been publicly designated. The Junction Sheep Range Provincial Park provides winter forage for California bighorn sheep, and the Churn Creek Protected Area encompasses the historic Empire Valley Ranch.

This book is convincing proof that we cannot afford to lose any more of our precious Cariboo-Chilcotin grasslands.

Evergreen Playground: A Road Trip through British Columbia

Dennis J. Duffy

Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 2008. 99 minutes

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Queen's University

Evergreen Playground is the DVD version of the movie of the same name that was part of the exhibition "Free Spirits: Stories of You, Me and BC," held at the Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM) in 2008. Marking

one of the museum's first forays into multimedia publishing, it draws on the extensive collection of moving images held at the British Columbia Archives to give viewers a sampling of colour travelogue films from the early 1940s to the late 1960s.

The DVD is accompanied by an illustrated twelve-page booklet in which Dennis Duffy traces the provincial government's historical involvement in travelogue production. In the first four decades of the twentieth century the government would commission these films, but the growing importance of tourism and automobile travel in the late 1930s led it to establish an in-house production service. The task was assigned to the BC Government Travel Bureau in 1939, around the same time that sixteen-millimetre colour film was becoming readily available. Duffy calls the following thirty-year period the "golden age of the BC government travelogue," and this is certainly true in terms of quantity, if not originality (3). Travelogue films made during this period were characterized by a "linear structure" due to the fact that so many of them took the perspective of a motorist travelling along the province's improved and expanded highway network, driving past sites and sights in a relatively predictable sequence.

The booklet provides a succinct, thoughtful, and humorous contextualization of the images contained on the DVD, but a key topic that goes overlooked is the audience for these travelogues. Duffy hints at "ambitious programs ... of distribution" and "markets beyond North America" in the late 1950s, but the fact that copies of these films were held by the National Film Board and at Canadian consulates does not explain by whom and under what conditions they were watched (7). Without more information about the

viewership for these films, it is difficult to get a sense of their larger social, cultural, and economic significance.

There are seven “chapters” to the DVD, plus a bonus feature. The bonus track is actually the oldest piece in *Evergreen Playground*, a silent film from 1940 that shows the Government Travel Bureau engaged in the production of a tourism promotion campaign. Staff members are shown selecting photographic images for inclusion in brochures, shooting and editing films, and engaging in routine activities like answering visitors’ inquiries.

Duffy describes the seven chapters that comprise the main part of the DVD as “composite travelogues,” indicating that they have been stitched together from multiple original travelogues (9). Each ten- to twelve-minute-long chapter is actually made up of excerpts from between two and five films, edited so that they form a relatively coherent journey through a region of the province. Viewers can take a “road trip” around Vancouver Island, the Fraser Valley, the Boundary country, the Kootenays, the Okanagan, the Fraser Canyon and Cariboo, and northern British Columbia. In a few instances the date of a clip is indicated. For example, one showing Barkerville in 1955 is followed by another showing it in 1969, thus illustrating the BC Parks Branch’s transformation of the sleepy ghost town into a bustling tourist attraction.

As Duffy points out, these travelogues are interesting not only because they provide views of bygone people and places but also because they suggest the existence of an unreflexive enthusiasm for pleasure travel that seems distinctly foreign in the present era of limited-access highways, resort condominiums, and environmental consciousness. Eye-catching attractions were latched onto

indiscriminately, the ultramodern jumbled together with the ancient, the fantastic with the mundane, the faux with the real. One sternwheel steamboat provides a vital transportation link, another is beached to serve as a historical attraction. Grimy coalminers in the Crowsnest Pass and the lake monster Ogoopogo are equally symbolic of a region’s identity. Idyllic parks and sunny beaches go hand in hand with enormous hydroelectric dams. Agriculture is appreciated through roadside fruit stands, First Nations people through souvenir sweaters. The province’s history gets streamlined into “wild west” themes like gold rushes and cowboys and Indians. All this with nary a whiff of irony or trace of concern about authenticity or contradiction. In a period said to epitomize the “high modern,” these travelogue films offer a decidedly postmodern perspective on the province’s landscape.

How much have things changed since the golden age of the government travelogue? The over-the-top enthusiasm is absent from today’s tourism promotion campaigns, and some of the places seen in these films have changed radically. Yet, an aspect of *Evergreen Playground* that will strike most viewers is the consistency in what has constituted a tourist attraction in British Columbia. There are spaces, places, images, and activities in each of these travelogues that will be immediately familiar to anyone who has driven around the province, suggesting that these films contributed to the production of real and symbolic landscapes that are still very much with us.

Evergreen Playground can be appreciated not only as a popular history of travelogue films but also as an ironic or nostalgic trip through the postwar years. The DVD case invites viewers to “chuckle at the overstated (and

sometimes wacky) period narration,” and there certainly are instances in which the viewer can’t help but shake her/his head and wonder what on earth led the BC Government Travel Bureau to include some utterly bizarre or perfectly banal scene in a travelogue. However, the obvious shifts between film stock and narration in each composite travelogue do help to remind viewers that these films are historical artefacts in and of themselves.

Evergreen Playground will likely prove a hit in the provincial museum’s gift shop, and it also has a place in the library of anyone interested in the cultural history of twentieth-century British Columbia. This is especially so for those interested in consumption, tourism promotion, and the construction of recreational space. The DVD’s production values are excellent, and the viewer is left hoping that the RBCM will be able to share more of the province’s moving image history in the near future.

*The Politics of Voting: Reforming
Canada’s Electoral System*

Dennis Pilon

Toronto: Edmond Montgomery
Publications, 2007. 209 pp.
\$33.00 paper.

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THE AUDIENCE FOR *The Politics of Voting* is likely an informed public that is grappling with the arguments for and against electoral reform in Canada. In this book, Dennis Pilon has two goals, each of which reaches a different potential audience. His first goal is to present the case

for proportional representation (PR) in Canadian elections. He has very little patience for Canada’s existing single member plurality (SMP) system, dismissing it as “essentially a medieval voting mechanism” (48) that does not serve democracy. In Chapter 3, Pilon outlines the failings of the SMP system, including its tendency to waste votes and to distort the representation of political parties as well as its failure to represent the diversity of Canada’s population in the House of Commons. He also demonstrates that SMP often generates majority governments that do not in fact have the support of a majority of the voters and that it does not automatically guarantee an alteration of parties in power. In Chapter 4, Pilon lays out PR as an alternative, showing how it performs better in achieving democratic outcomes than does the existing SMP system.

Pilon makes an accessible and well-argued case for electoral reform. He does not get dragged down by the detailed mechanics of various electoral systems; indeed, these are discussed only very briefly in a few pages in Chapter 2. For example, readers searching for a detailed explanation of how the single transferable vote (STV) – the system at issue in the referenda in British Columbia – works will need to look elsewhere. Instead, Pilon’s focus is on the implications of a system of representation that accurately translates vote shares into seat shares. He marshals an impressive range of evidence, from federal elections to provincial politics to the experiences of other countries, to make his case. One of the book’s strengths is that it is well grounded in the research into electoral systems but is still accessible to someone not interested in the intricacies of some of these debates. One of the more interesting aspects of Pilon’s

case comes in Chapter 7, where he discusses the relative merits of STV and the mixed member proportional (MMP) systems, the two leading alternatives to the SMP system among electoral reform advocates. He argues that the differences between the two systems are relatively minor and that they are often overstated by their defenders. In this chapter, he clearly has in mind the BC example, where potential allies for the cause of electoral reform have been less than enthusiastic in their support because they preferred the MMP system over the STV system. Pilon attempts to make the case that either system is a significant improvement over SMP.

The second goal of the book is reflected in its title, through which Pilon implores his readers to bring politics back to the debate over electoral systems. Although the arguments for PR, which constitute the first goal of the book, might be well-trodden territory for those already versed in those debates, the discussion of the politics of electoral reform may not be so familiar and hence of more interest. Pilon is critical of the attempt to reduce the debate over electoral systems to a choice between competing values, arguing that we need to look at the actual political implications of different systems. In looking at the history of voting reform in Chapter 5, for example, Pilon argues that electoral reform does not occur because of commitment to values but, rather, because someone can benefit from the change and organizes to see it implemented. Electoral reform, he argues, is about politics, not values. This argument is expressed most clearly in his critique of the process of the British Columbia Citizens Assembly and its recommendation of STV. While commending the assembly members for their engagement and hard work, he argues that the exclusion of political

considerations in the way the debate was framed and the exclusion of political parties and politicians from the process led the assembly to choose STV over MMP, which, he argues, might have enjoyed the organizational support of the New Democratic Party, the Green Party, and other actors in civil society.

This very interesting part of the book raises some questions that are not completely answered. Pilon's description of why electoral reform has become an issue in so many Canadian provinces at the same time (90-92) is a little thin, perhaps because of the wide range of topics he addresses. He does not outline the politics behind this development as clearly as he could, other than by noting the way that governments have handcuffed the process by requiring super-majorities in referenda. I was also not completely convinced by the implication that a referendum on MMP might have been more successful in British Columbia than a referendum on STV simply because it might have mobilized those who stood to benefit from it. Although it is clear that Pilon is sceptical about populism, the fact is that it is a feature of Canadian political culture and public opinion. This means that an MMP option might have been criticized for strengthening party control over candidates, a feature that might have lost an MMP option as many votes as it might have gained from those unhappy with STV.

Despite these minor weaknesses, this is a welcome addition to the literature on electoral reform in Canada and is recommended to both general informed readers and to those who follow such debates more closely.

*Me Sexy: An Exploration of
Native Sex and Sexuality*

Drew Hayden Taylor, editor

Toronto/Vancouver: Douglas and
McIntyre, 2008. 192 pp. \$22.95 paper.

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IS CREE A SEXY LANGUAGE? Do indigenous people have less pubic hair than settler people? How are love, sex, and decolonization intimately related? These questions, and many more, are examined by the wide selection of writers showcased in Drew Hayden Taylor's edited collection, *Me Sexy: An Exploration of Native Sex and Sexuality*. As the much anticipated follow-up to his work on indigenous humour, *Me Funny*, Taylor's new collection of thirteen essays offers an equally hilarious but still scholarly probing of the subject of sex and its place in indigenous communities. Taylor proclaims that the book "will inform you. It will shock you. It will make you laugh. It may even make you blush. But above all else, it is a book about honesty, love, and survival" (3). *Me Sexy* is revealing and important as it documents the different ways in which indigenous peoples struggle to create spaces to live and love each other in Canada's colonial society.

A central objective of *Me Sexy* is to explode the perception of indigenous sexuality as purely negative. For example, Taylor's essay makes it clear that, for many Canadians, indigenous peoples "are rarely viewed as sexual beings. And if they are, their sexuality is not healthy" (23). Similarly, Marius P. Tunglik, a survivor of child sexual abuse and long-time activist with regard to exposing the dark history of residential

schools, attests to the unhealthy views of sexuality that many indigenous people themselves hold. Tunglik argues that many indigenous people were abused "physically, sexually, emotionally, spiritually, and culturally" and that the trauma of these experiences has had an intergenerational impact on indigenous communities (54). While Tunglik recounts horror stories, she also talks about hope and healing and the need to create environments where indigenous peoples can feel safe and loved.

Me Sexy, then, is as much a discussion about sex and sexuality as it is a meditation on the tactics and strategies of decolonization. Just as Tunglik's essay on abuse and residential schools encourages healing as a method of decolonization, the other essays in *Me Sexy* debate what is needed to decolonize indigenous minds, bodies, and ideas about sex. For example, Daniel Heath Justice claims: "To take joy in sex [is] about being beautiful to ourselves and others ... To take joy in our bodies – and those bodies in relation to others – is to strike out against five-hundred plus years of disregard, disrespect, and dismissal" (103–04). Not only does Justice believe that creating such an understanding is "fuel for the healing of our nations," but he also makes it clear that, as such, "every orgasm can be an act of decolonization" (106). Similarly, in her essay on why she decided to establish indigenous erotica, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm explains: "I wanted to liberate myself. To decolonize myself" (112). For Akiwenzie-Damm, erotica – when about love and not about power – is essential, and embracing it will be crucial for indigenous peoples to "truly decolonize [their] hearts and minds" (113). It is important to recognize, however, that attempting to control indigenous sexuality, in various forms, was and continues to be a crucial

element of colonizing projects. More could have been said overall about the necessity of linking the decolonization of indigenous sexuality with a broader decolonization movement that seeks to make important social, cultural, and economic changes in both indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

Nevertheless, the essays in *Me Sexy* complement each other in working towards creating a more inclusive conversation about sex, sexuality, and love. As one essay proclaims, “we can all learn something from the willingness to engage some of these basic questions of life, love, and belonging” (105). From discussions of indigenous queer culture, to age discrimination, to art and erotica, the contributors of *Me Sexy* make it clear that everyone, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, has a place in this very important and intimate conversation.

One Native Life

Richard Wagamese

Toronto/Vancouver: Douglas and
McIntyre, 2008. 272 pp.
\$29.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

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FOR MUCH OF his life, Richard Wagamese has searched for a sense of belonging and struggled to find his identity as an indigenous person living in Canada. In *One Native Life*, Wagamese shares an intimate collection of personal short stories documenting his journey: a life of abuse, abandonment, displacement, and eventual reconnection to his indigenous roots and to the power of the land. Wagamese makes clear,

though, that his stories “are positive,” “embrace healing,” and are inspired by the powerful lessons that have shaped his being in the world (4). *One Native Life* is an important book because it offers hope that the deep wounds caused by centuries of colonial exploitation in Canada may one day be healed. It also attests to the fact that these wounds are still experienced on a daily, personal level by many indigenous peoples. Storytelling, as a form of cross-cultural communication, is suggested as one possible method of creating healthy and happy social relationships among the different peoples of Canada. In the words of Wagamese, “Everyone has a story ... We become better people, a better species, when we take time to hear them. That’s how you change the world, really. One story, one voice at a time” (203).

One Native Life contains sixty-five stories that are divided into four books: Ahki (Earth), Ishskwaday (Fire), Nibi (Water), and Ishpiming (Universe). From this diverse selection emerge accounts not only of disappointment and racial discrimination but also of the transformative power of love and caring. As Wagamese reminds us, “Sometimes life turns us upside down and backwards. It’s caring that gets us back on our feet again and pointed in the right direction” (33). In this regard, two amazing stories stick out. The first story took place when, as a teenager, Wagamese ran away from his foster home and ended up moving in with some hippies in Miami Beach. One day, when he was feeling blue, he entered a diner and ordered a slice of lemon meringue pie. A few minutes later, heavy-weight boxing champion Muhammad Ali, who was training in the area, sat down next to him, imparted valuable advice on how to stay mentally strong in the face of adversity,

and even bought him a slice of pie and a chocolate milkshake. According to Wagamese, meeting Ali gave him “the strength to carry on” (76).

The second inspirational story occurred many years later when, after stints of living in poverty and on the streets, Wagamese reconnected with his indigenous birth family and began the long process of relearning the Ojibway culture and language. During that time, while working as an entertainment writer, he had the opportunity to interview folk legend Johnny Cash. Cash had just released an album entitled *Bitter Tears (Ballads of the American Indian)*, which addressed many of the issues facing indigenous peoples in North America in the 1970s. Wagamese remembers having a moving conversation with Cash about this record and about land claims, treaty rights, and the ongoing work that is required for decolonization. He recalls that Cash spoke of “love, family, communication and forgiveness” (184). Like Ali, Cash took the time to listen to Wagamese and inspire him to be strong by exchanging personal stories. Such profound moments contributed significantly to Wagamese’s healing process.

One Native Life sheds light on indigenous peoples’ struggle for belonging in a colonial society and, at the same time, reminds us of the power of love, caring, and community. Wagamese’s stories, however, represent only one voice, one perspective. It is my hope that books like *One Native Life* can spark much needed conversations among indigenous and non-indigenous peoples about how to forge new strategies of healing and political struggle in the twenty-first century. In this sense, Wagamese’s point is important, that “we heal each other by sharing stories of our time here. We heal each other

through love ... There’s no bigger gift, and all it takes is listening and hearing” (181). While the legacies of colonialism and the forces of capitalism continue to shape our daily lives, we must recognize that, by listening to, organizing with, and simply loving each other, we are all capable of changing the world.



*Writing the West Coast:
In Love with Place*

Edited by Christine Lowther
and Anita Sinner

Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2008.
272 pp. \$24.95 paper

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IN THE TWO GENERATIONS since the first postmodern attempts to create a pan-cultural literature of place on the Pacific Coast, the context of landscape writing in British Columbia has been radically transformed. The environmental movement has found a new voice as the Green Movement; Clayoquot Sound has seen an end to mass logging; two towns of the working coast, Tofino and Ucluelet, have become world surfing destinations; environmental studies programs flourish at the university level; the North Coast is now the Great Bear Rainforest; Atlantic salmon nudge at net pens in the Broughton Archipelago; the reclamation of Aboriginal cultures has proceeded apace; and thousands of new settlers have moved to the rainforest beaches. *Writing the West Coast* is a ceremonial gathering of voices from this age of transformation. It consists largely of meditations on self and memory, on youth and age, and on suburbanization versus wilderness, and it is punctuated by a small selection of photographs empty of people. The book is defined by the discrepancy between the non-human West Coast and the human West Coast.

Evidenced by the texts, the Coast represented here has deep roots in nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial language. Alexandra Morton, for example, describes the Broughton

Archipelago as her “beloved”; Chandra Wong describes the landscape of Tofino as “myriad colours sooth[ing] the eye”; Helen Clay is “aware of the undercurrent of joy that bubbles up” within her in the rainforest; Christine Lowther writes of Meares Island as a “paradise”; Joanna Streetly sees the “sea” as a “limpid swirling”; Sherry Merk hears the “wild shores of Clayoquot Sound s[ing] a siren song”; David Pitt-Brooke chases a “will-o’-the-wisp”; and so on. Such texts stand firmly on a foundation comprised of Christina Rossetti and John Keats. It is as if the twenty-first century began in 1871/1993 (the year of the Clayoquot protests).

These are not, of course, historical essays. They are personal ones, rising from an impulse perhaps best described by Joanna Streetly as “an indescribable language of personal connection and memory – the language of home.” Although *Writing the West Coast* could have benefited from a concerted attempt to actually describe that impulse, it instead presents such Darwinian conjecture as Darcy Dobell’s “Back in the deep recesses of thrush history, a few wandering individuals chanced to nest somewhere slightly outside the range of the rest of the population,” which is used in contrast to the book’s implicit narrative of respect as a metaphor in support of the Coast’s contemporary colonialization. Similarly, instead of political history, we get Eli Enns’s “Having recently gained independence from Great Britain in 1783, the United States at that time was a young industrious country whose leaders had adopted an expansionist policy” – a passage without the detail or specificity that might link that history to this specific stretch of this specific coast. Granted, such history is not the point of a community celebration, but without some extended awareness of the non-

Aboriginal history that predated the book's post-Clayoquot settlers, there is little to convince readers that the authors are speaking of a specific coast and not merely the predilections that led them to it.

Stylistically, most of these essays give rise to similar doubts. For all the sharpness of such opening sentences as, for example, Adrienne Mason's "The single whistle of the saw-whet owl pierced through the dark, startling me just as I was drifting off," or of Bonny Glambeck's "You're paddling home? You two are crazy!" physicality in these pieces is most often quickly harnessed to personal narrative. Such debate openers may be the perfect form for an age of persuasion, but they are also at odds with the book's intent to present an alternative to the placelessness of suburbanization. This discrepancy speaks to an issue of trust: if the writers of this volume are our new explorers (and I do not doubt that they are; I accept the passion with which they witness their experience), they will fail at bequeathing us the natural world if they cannot write of it in anything other than personal or colonial or global terms. It is only readers already convinced of the primacy of individual experience who will be convinced by the testaments of this book.

Personal experience on the Coast didn't always look like this. The Aboriginal Coast that the poet-historian Charles Lillard wrote out of from the 1960s through the 1990s, for example, was, by his definition, a continuous biome stretching from Alaska to California – a land with historically deep cultural roots and a contemporary culture that rose from Aboriginal civilizations; Russian colonialism; nineteenth-century trading, whaling, and fishing cultures; gypo logging culture; the influences of

such "languages" as Wawa and "West Talk"; and the experience of people living in isolation on float camps and logging shows up and down the Coast. This Coast was steeped in history, intimately traced by a man who came to consciousness in it and only found the world through its indigenous forms. Lillard's Coast was here before the back-to-the-land movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, yet he embraced these and sought to embed them in history. It didn't work: *Writing the West Coast* proceeds largely as if Lillard's Coast did not exist. Its history begins only where Lillard's ends, after his death from cancer in 1997. It is a book about the post-Clayoquot Tofino area (with the addition of the equally "wild" Strathcona Park and the Broughton Archipelago areas). Presumably, this "wild" Coast is the physical Coast itself. It is characterized on the land side by shingle, sand, fjords, waterfalls, hot springs, cliffs, fog, rain, cedar trees, bears, salal, licorice fern, elk, and so forth, and on the ocean side by surf, orcas, storm, halibut, salmon, sea lions, tides (etc.), and all the power of water on the earth's largest and richest ocean. Nonetheless, that Coast's very real physical presence is overshadowed by the book's social Coast, which arose from the act of discovering in oneself the former, finding in its physicality a sense of home, and staying and making a society around it. *Writing the West Coast* is a reflection of that society. It is a document of the human Coast, not in Lillard's sense of modern and ancient indigenous cultures forming a new culture together but, rather, of global cultural settlement drawing its definitions from the sense of wilderness its citizens first encountered here, and the slow dissolution of that sense into a feeling of home.

For all of the book's 272 packed pages, this cultural territory remains strangely undefined. It lies somewhere between the non-human but nurturing wilderness of Alexandra Morton's "The Broughton Archipelago gripped between Knight and Kingcome Inlets," which "was once home to perhaps 10,000 First Nation people," and which "generously offered exactly what they needed to thrive"; her "Today, places like Broughton should be held sacred, since they provide clean air, water and food"; and the social landscape of Nadine (Kliiahtah) Crookes's "There is no word in Nuu-chah-nulth for 'wild' or 'wilderness.' There is only 'home.'" Ironically, these competing notions of home, culture, experience, and history mediating between the personal/impersonal natures of suburbia and "wilderness" chronicle not only the transformation of wilderness into "home" but also the more problematic transformation of home into wilderness. Somewhere within this seesaw debate lie the land and water and the people who live through them. Somewhere, there is a way of writing that brings them together. It is not, however, in words such as these by Brionny Penn: "Go to any biology department of a university and you have to look hard to find the ecology section. They are the unfunded, poor cousins stomped into oblivion by the biotech industry and the professional vandals of the corporate university." Those are passionate words. They may (or may not) be based on a wealth of detail and research, but since they are presented only as a witness text of personal experience, within a book of witness texts of personal experiences, they ultimately fail to convince.

Writing the West Coast collects source documents of a new, energetic, and complex people with often less than a generation of history and sense of place,

passionate ideologies, nineteenth-century language, cookie-cutter essay structures, a frequent inability to describe the physical space that so affects them, and a reliance on memory narratives to generate respect. At the end of this volume, I was entirely convinced of the authenticity of the experience of these writers; I was not convinced of its trustworthiness. As Brian Brett writes in the book's opening and strongest piece, "It's becoming more and more evident that we are all drunk on the last, unspoiled beaches of a dying planet, cheering as the fires go out." Now that these important, ritual statements of belonging vital to any roundtable discussion have created a circle of intimacy, I hope the editors and writers will continue this discussion and clarify and complete their task by finding words for the coast itself.