

## **Book Reviews**

***Under The Gaze: Learning to Be Black in White Society.*** Jennifer Kelly. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 1998; 133 pages, ISBN 1-895686-2-1; \$15.95.

This valuable book outlines the narratives of 26 Black females and 23 Black males aged 15 to 20 and drawn from grades 10, 11 and 12 at two Edmonton High Schools, on the issues of Black identity development.

### **Student Narratives**

In chapter three, "Locating Sources For Identity," the students note the imagery of Blacks promoted by the media and film industry in the US. These images are often urban, criminalized and negative. Sources of positive images include icons of Black resistance, such as Mandela and Malcolm X, as well as parents and Black community organizations. The students also identify the dearth of positive imagery and knowledge of Canadian Black history overall.

In "Peer and Gender Relations" (chapter four), students identify ways in which racial distinctiveness become social markers for taunts, racist comments, hostility and open conflict between fellow Blacks and non-Black students. As a result, peer relationships with non-Blacks are difficult to develop and to sustain. Conversely or in response to this phenomena, a redemptive Black identity is forged and contained to a large degree within racial and ethnic boundaries and reflected in institutions such as the Black church. Thus Black identity is cemented in the separateness or otherness of Blacks from non-Blacks.

Expectedly, the construction of Black sexual identity appears to be forged differently between Black female and Black males. For Black females, sexual identity is developed with a sense of responsibility toward self which was expressed as "going it alone" - that is, without dependence on a Black male partner. Black males appear to carve out their sexual identities through varying relationships with Black or non-Black females.

### **On Framework**

The author frames her study within the historic and contemporary processes of racialization in Canada. However, understanding Black identity development from the regional perspective of Western Canada is an important perspective and contribution of this study. Hence, a more focussed outline and analysis of the particulars and perspectives of racialization of that region of Canada would strengthen this text. Moreover, a focus on Western Canada and Edmonton would facilitate comparisons to be made between the racializing process, with its particular concomitant structural or systemic dimensions within Western Canada, and racialization which occurs in provinces and cities such as Ontario (Toronto) and Nova Scotia (Halifax).

### **Decentering Black Identities**

The author analyzes Black identity as not unified but decentred, with a plurality of interlocking centres (121). This issue of decentering or shifting from an identity rooted in nationality, for example Jamaican or Ghanaian, to an identity based on racial distinctiveness and the fluidity of that identity - for example, from Jamaican to Black or from Canadian to African-Canadian - needs further exploration. An important study such as this could be strengthened by examining the extent to which students are able to distinguish these shifting identities, their complexities and contradictions, and the extent to and situations in which these identities become fused.

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***Regulating Class Privilege: Immigrant Servants in Canada, 1940s-1990s.*** Patricia Daenzer. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1993; ISBN 1551308807; \$24.95.