

Mary Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900–50*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998, 248 pp.

Review by T. Kue Young, Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Manitoba.

In publishing *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900–1950*, Mary Ellen Kelm has made a substantial contribution to scholarship in the field of Aboriginal health in Canada. This is a regional history with extensive use of primary archival materials, supplemented by a thorough review of the secondary sources and ethnographic fieldwork involving interviews with elders. It is very well organized and written. It is also an enjoyable read. It treats health in a comprehensive manner, with attention to disease patterns, health determinants, health care and health beliefs. The chapter on sanitation and housing is especially valuable, since this topic has not been well researched by others.

I am enthusiastic about this book, despite my aversion to anything that is billed as post-modernist and/or feminist. There are the occasional instances of dense prose such as “Colonial praxis has situated Aboriginal bodies as particular sites of struggle” (p. 100), but this probably reflects my own ignorance and lack of theoretical training. In fact, this book clearly appeals to the generalist readers, the non-Foucaultian “lay” public, one might say, and the mountains of data allow the readers to draw their own conclusions in whatever theoretical framework they might choose.

I am particularly impressed by the extensive use of the National Archives. Here is one gold mine of historical data on Aboriginal health and health care that has only been lightly tapped. We all know there is “good stuff” in there, but it takes a scholar such as Kelm to sift through the archives and weave a compelling narrative.

While a regional study of British Columbia First Nations, Kelm is well informed on national trends and has succeeded in placing her region and period in the national context. This book is based on the author’s Ph.D. thesis in history from the University of Toronto. It should be an inspiration to graduate students. If this is the usual standard of University of Toronto history Ph.D.s, then it must be a very well respected good degree. The transformation from thesis to book is done smoothly – certainly there is no evidence of a warmed-over thesis, which publishers are well trained to screen out.

Kelm currently teaches history at the University of Northern B.C. One would hope that she continues her research in this field to the benefit of students and scholars across the country.

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