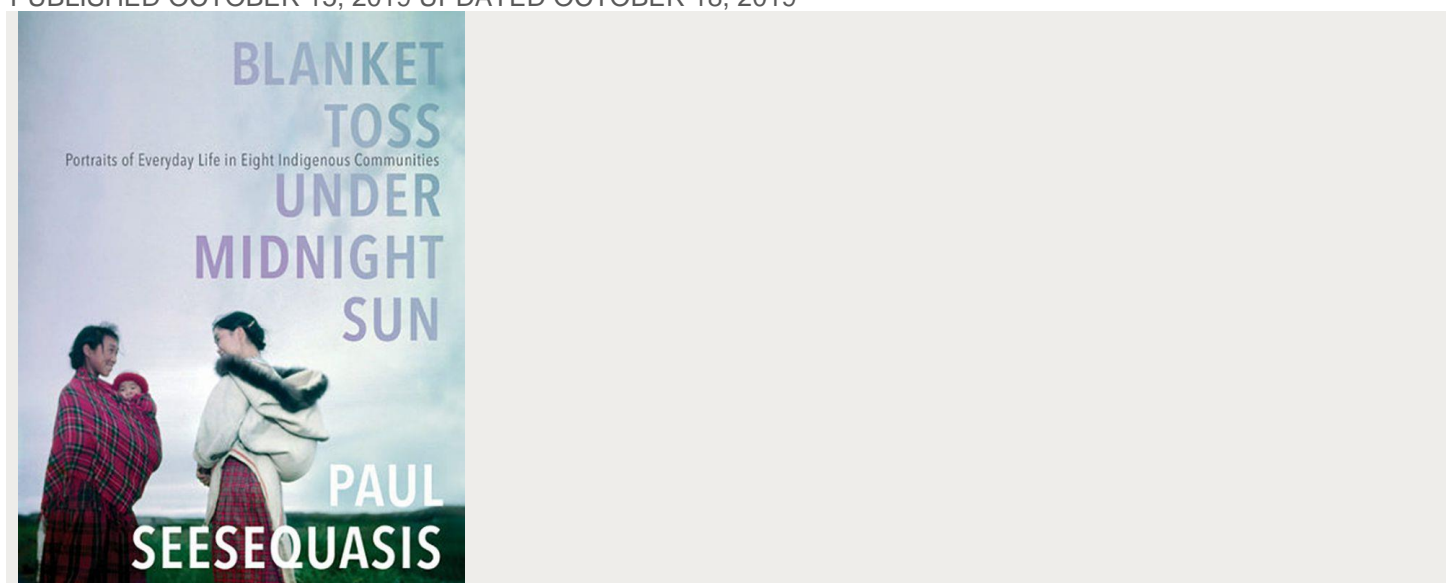


Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun reframes Indigenous history with archival portraits of daily life

Writer Paul Seesequasis scoured through countless photos of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and sought to tell the stories of the people in those images

DAVE MCGINN

PUBLISHED OCTOBER 15, 2019 UPDATED OCTOBER 18, 2019



Paul Seesequasis wants Canadians to see Indigenous lives the way many of us never have before. In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Seesequasis, a Saskatoon-based writer, journalist and cultural advocate, began collecting archival photos of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities from the 1920s to the 1970s, which he then posted on social media.

His new book, *Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun: Portraits of Everyday Life in Eight Indigenous Communities*, collects many of those photos and features interviews with some of the photographers and their subjects, giving a more complete picture of what was captured on camera.

The Globe and Mail spoke to Seesequasis about how the project began and what he hopes readers take from the book.



e010799808

Annie Johannese with Johnny in Kuujjuaq, Nunavik.

ROSEMARY EATON © LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

Tell me about how this project began for you.

It actually started around four years ago, around the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was going across the country. My mom, who is still very much alive, was a residential-school survivor, as are all my aunts and uncles. There was something on the radio about residential schools and she just made a comment that there was a strength to our family and other families during those hard times and we never hear that side of the story. That just piqued my interest. I started to research public archives and find photos up to the 1970s. The photos kind of countered the image of just being victims of the residential schools. I started posting these [on social media]. The response was quite overwhelming. People began to name the photos. In many cases these photos just had very generic descriptions in the archives, if at all. When I posted them we were able to get names to them, or locations. It became part of a visual reclamation or naming process, as well as just seeing these photos themselves and how they frame a different view of Indigenous history in this country.



e010799915

ROSEMARY EATON © LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

Why do you think they struck such a chord with people?

They show the strength and resilience of generations and that through the hardest days of the past – residential schools, forced relocations in the north, et cetera – it was the family bonds and kinship that kept the culture and the language alive. It was in many ways a visual connection to the past that we as viewers don't see enough of.



Kananginak
Pootoogook poses for
Rosemary Eaton in
Cape Dorset circa
1958.

ROSEMARY EATON ©
LIBRARY AND
ARCHIVES CANADA

e010767681

You interviewed some of the people featured in photos in the book, as well as some of the photographers. What was that like?

Some people didn't know the photographs existed. On the other hand there were people who actually remembered the moment the photograph was taken. Talking to them was really rewarding and fruitful.

I really liked George Legrady's photos, especially the one of the Fort George Rockers and the story you tell of the rock band going on tour by canoe.

That was awesome. Actually that just came together in an interview with [band member] Oliver Rupert. They're still playing, 50 years later, which is kind of awesome as well. They're a bit like the Stones in that way, they haven't stopped.



e010868908

Imaapik Jacob Partridge in Kuujuaq, Nunavik, 1955.

ROSEMARY EATON © LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA/HANDOUT

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-paul-seesequasis-reframes-canadas-indigenous-history-in-blanket-toss/>

How did you source all these photographs?

Initially it was through public archives – libraries, museums, historical societies. But as the project built in momentum that's when I came in contact with a couple of the private collections of photographers who were still alive. And as it went on I had people send me photos they had that they had no context for. In almost all cases these are amateur photographers. It just kind of unfolded as it went on.

What criteria did you use for inclusion in the book?

It was difficult because there were literally hundreds and hundreds of photos. The book could have gone in two directions. It could have been just a general overview of some of these photos with no real connection between them other than their Indigenous subject matter. But it made more sense to focus on eight regions, eight communities and build narratives out of that. They are very diverse regions with diverse histories, so the book has a unity to it, but also it has very much a separation in terms of the specific historical contexts for each region at the time when the photos were taken.

The lives in these regions are ones many Canadians aren't all that familiar with.

Exactly. Many Canadians really have no concept of the scope and size of this country and also the diversity and the way people live once you get outside of the major cities and once you get up north or to more remote areas. So hopefully the photos will provide a window onto that world.



Left to right, artists Iyola Kingwatsiak, Lukta Qiatsuq and Eegyvudluk Pootoogook inside the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, 1960.

ROSEMARY EATON

e011177385

On that note, what do you hope readers get from the book?

I hope it opens their eyes to the diversity of Indigenous communities, whether they are First Nations, Métis or Inuit, and also that it serves as a [way of showing] the resilience and strength of these communities, and of individuals within these communities.

Expand your mind and build your reading list with the Books newsletter. [Sign up today.](#)