



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

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itself, but the scope for choice, the range of options available to individuals. There is much evidence in Brock's book that choice was narrowly circumscribed, most clearly in areas of the continent deemed valuable by the Europeans.

It is noted that those who chose not to redefine themselves may well have been those who did not survive, and members of today's Adnyamathanha community trace their ancestry to just a few families; the argument is held not to apply to those who were rounded up and forced on to distant institutions, without indication of how many people fall within this category in the wider Australian context. In another passage, Brock discusses the paternalism of missionaries, which confined Aboriginal people to the status of permanent inferiority; further, as the missions claimed control of the young, it is likely that there were no new initiates to maintain ceremony and ritual. Revealing insights are afforded into the extent of discrimination and violence: the killings in the period of pastoral incursion; seizure of land reserved for Aboriginal use; refusal of admittance to hospitals; exclusion of children from schools; exclusion from residence in some towns.

Back Trackers

R. Hurley, M. Langton and L. Griffiths

AIATSIS and Department of Employment, Education and Training, [1992], video, 24 min.

Lookin for Your Mob: A Guide to Tracing Aboriginal Family Trees

D. Smith and B. Halstead

Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, reprinted 1992, xvii + 132 pp.

Telling It Like It Is: A Guide to Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History

P. Taylor

AIATSIS, Canberra, 1992 x + 124 pp.

Reviewed by Sarah Martin

Justice for Aboriginal people and reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal depend largely on members of Aboriginal communities

In the conclusion, Brock observes that 'evaluating Aboriginal agency is controversial and will continue to be so as it relies on a very careful reading of the evidence' (p 162). But as much as we need careful reading of evidence, we also need to weigh the merits of differing conceptual approaches. Although important issues are raised, the full development of argument is not the strong point of the book. This is evident, for example, in the cursory discussion of what constitutes a 'ghetto', as well as in the lack of comparative analysis to enable the placing of the three reserves studied in the wider Australian context.

References

- Attwood, B.M. (1988) *The Making of the Aborigines*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
 Wirth, L. (1928) *The Ghetto*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Editor's Note: This Review originally appeared in *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1994/Number 1:61-63. We thank *Australian Aboriginal Studies* and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for allowing us to reprint it here. □

having full control over their lives, including the means to document, present and teach their history and culture from an Aboriginal perspective. The

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handing down and teaching of history at a local level is a good place for this process to start. This may also provide a counter-balance to stereotyped media portrayals of what being Aboriginal is all about, and to some educational resources which attempt to generalise about Aboriginal life for the whole of Australia.

Telling It Like It Is and the video *Black Trackers* have been funded by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), through the National Reconciliation and Schooling Strategy, and together with a reprint of *Lookin' for Your Mob* form a kit, also entitled *Telling It Like It Is*. The kit is being distributed to Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committees within schools with the aim of encouraging these community- and parent-based groups to create local Aboriginal history resources for use in schools.

Penny Taylor has used the depth of her considerable experience in the realm of Aboriginal history to write a how-to-do-it guide on the subject that is easy to read and use, and full of information. *Telling It Like It Is* is a valuable resource for anybody interested in Aboriginal history, or indeed any kind of oral history. Although aimed at use in schools, this guide fills a gap in the current literature and will be of interest to a wide range of students, community researchers, teachers, and historians. Taylor's book is valuable for Aboriginal people studying, researching or recording Aboriginal oral histories, and equally useful for those interested in assisting Aboriginal people in recording their history. It will also be of interest to other groups whose history has been neglected in the whitefella's history books, including Afghan, Chinese and Kanak.

What I really like about this book is its presentation. Taylor has done what few writers seem to be able to manage: write in an informative way without talking down to people. For people with little time or those who do not like reading, the book is

presented in such a way that a lot can be learnt from just flipping through. The photos with captions enable the reader to learn without effort. It is almost impossible to ignore all the interesting examples and quotes put into boxes throughout the text, and even those who are unused to books will be enticed into reading the important points and headings which stand out in bold text. The book is broken up into four parts with different sections, so it is easy to find a topic that you might particularly want to know about.

This book respects the differing attitudes of Aboriginal people. For example, on the subject of interviewing whites, Taylor points out that some people believe that, if you are trying to put an Aboriginal perspective into the history, then interviewing whites defeats the purpose. However, she gives some interesting examples where Aboriginal people have interviewed whites and obtained extra information, explanations of the actions of white people, and different perspectives. Through my own oral history recording, I have also found the converse is true, interesting perspectives on white history can be gained from interviewing Aboriginal people. After all, who understood white station people better than the black women who nursed them and wiped their dirty *thithi* and watched them grow up? Who understood the precarious and foolhardy actions of many pastoralists better than their black stockmen?

It is important that throughout this book people are reminded that written history cannot replace oral tradition, but that it can be used to enrich Aboriginal history, especially in those areas where Aboriginal people have been moved from their country.

Telling It Like It Is begins with a discussion on history: what it is, why it is important, when it is history, the difference between oral cultures and written cultures, and history and truth. Taylor

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manages to put over all the important reasons for recording Aboriginal history, including the relationship between the past, present and the future (something which Aboriginal people understand a lot better than your average non-Aboriginal Australian), identity, pride and self esteem, justice for Aboriginal people, and learning from the past, so that the same mistakes are not made again. Taylor makes the point that Australian history is made up of two different and overlapping histories, and that only when this is recognised and indigenous history is reclaimed at a local level can these two histories become a shared history.

The second part of the guide deals with historical research and written records. This provides a concise summary and the reader is directed to other useful resources, including *Lookin For Your Mob*.

The third and most important part of the book deals with oral history, including a discussion on what oral history is and how to record it. Topics include: equipment, interviewing, ownership of material, sensitive areas in interviewing, making interviews interesting, transcribing tapes, indexing, food stories, and an oral history research summary. This part takes up nearly half the book and is done in detail, with many interesting examples and quotes. The particularly difficult subject of editing and writing for different audiences is approached with sensitivity. As Taylor says, this is the most challenging aspect of oral history and requires a lot of thought and consultation with the storyteller.

The final part of *Telling It Like It Is* deals with presenting history. Topics include: organising materials in different ways, examples of small histories, regional and community histories, other ways of presenting history (plays, music, paintings and murals, music and dance, poetry, and of

course video and film), and publishing local histories.

Lookin For Your Mob complements *Telling It Like It Is* by providing a gentle introduction into the art of extracting information from government and church records, museums and archives. It also provides a list of relevant Aboriginal organisations and historical and genealogical societies. The second part of this book shows how to draw up a family tree, or genealogy, and even provides a lift-out family tree chart to photocopy (although this chart is definitely not big enough for the average Aboriginal family!)

The video *Back Trackers* forms an important part of the kit. This is presented with some quirky humour by Ron Hurley and is a good introduction for high school students, communities or individuals wishing to start doing some Aboriginal history. It is a useful history-teaching resource and also presents some outstanding Aboriginal role models, including the 1939-45 war fighter pilot, Leonard Waters. His daughter, Kim, is writing his story, which is unique in Australian history. Kim says that her father's main concern is that Aboriginal children are shown that they can achieve their desired goals and that 'the sky's the limit'!

Historian Peter Read talks about written records and what to do if they disagree with what people say. He advises researchers to listen to all kinds of opinions from all kinds of people and to use their own judgment to put together the full story of the community history.

Alick Jackomos tells about his life as a soldier, boxer, and fighter for Aboriginal rights. His collection of 2,000 historical photos of Victorian Aboriginal people is now housed in the AIATSIS archives. He also talks about the history of Aboriginal soldiers, and says that all kids, black

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and white, should know about these people and recognise them as heroes.

Doreen Kartinyeri talks about family trees, and about some of the problems she has encountered during her years of experience doing genealogies of the Narrinyeri people. Doreen has published four genealogies and has another five ready to publish, and she advises people to get their families' trees done now before it is too late.

Finally, the art of Ian Abdulla is presented as a pictorial history. His naive style of art shows more detail and colour about the lifestyle of his people along the Murray River than any plain text or photographic records could ever contain. Robert Tickner also appears on this video and was responsible for the allocation of funding for the kit. He makes this memorable statement:

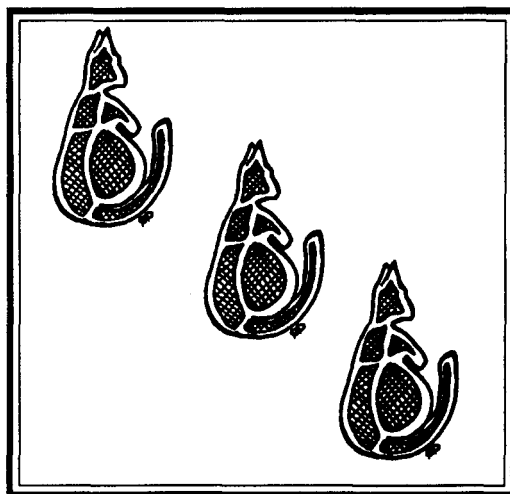
If we could get schools across Australia to ...work with local Aboriginal communities, work with the kids in the schools, develop these local histories — look! We can change this country. It is so important for those kids to understand their own history, to learn history from their own people, from an Aboriginal perspective.

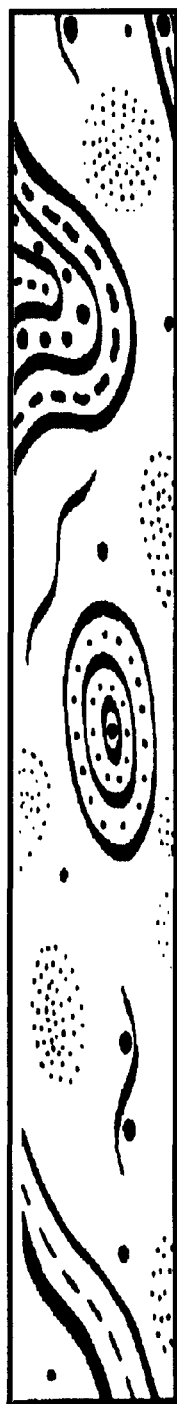
As the parent of an Aboriginal school child, I certainly agree with this statement. My six-year-old son knows more about the local Paakantji history and culture than all of the teachers at his school put together. Last year he told his class a story about the mythological Thuuyika that Paakantji people strongly believe in, only to be told by his well-meaning teacher that it must be extinct. His teachers admit they do not know anything about the local Aboriginal history or culture and have few resources to work with. Even when they have resources, they cannot use them in the way intended, for example, they leave out all the Aboriginal language words in books. So who is teaching who? What can the ASSPA

committee do about this? Do these parents suddenly become oral historians in their spare time? Who is going to co-ordinate these efforts? This is clearly one of the roles of Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs) but our school doesn't have one. ASSPA committees are more likely to start a local history program in schools that have AEAs and, indeed, some such schools have already started. We need more Aboriginal teachers and AEAs in the schools, and to have them trained to teach local Aboriginal history and culture, to co-ordinate community people to come into the schools, and to co-ordinate the efforts of ASSPA committees.

Anyway, Ron Hurley finishes *Back Trackers* by encouraging people to get themselves a copy of the kit and start. That's what I'm going to do, so how about you?

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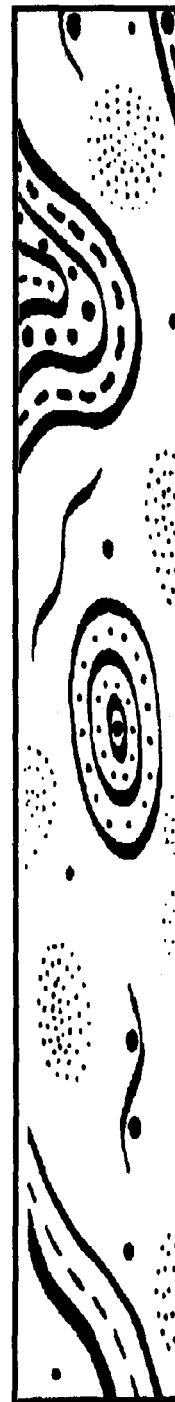


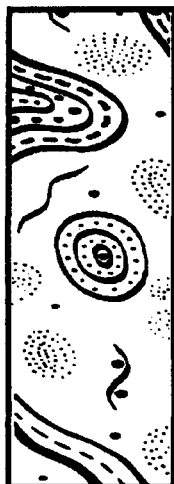
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The Aboriginal Child at School
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit
The University of Queensland
Brisbane QLD 4072 AUSTRALIA

Ph: (07) 3365 6699 Fax: (07) 3365 2359