



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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there is a sense of historical understanding that the horizon has been influenced by Aboriginal demands to be heard.

The essays provide many examples of the debates and complexities of issues such as sovereignty, the lack of sharing political domains, or the sharing of resources and wealth. It engages in an account of the denial to a formal negotiated settlement for the invasion and subversion of Aboriginal wealth. Further, the essays consider the refusal to negotiate an Aboriginal voice in policy and legal issues or the consideration of a truly representative space for Aboriginal cultural memory, which does not have strings attached.

Finally the many discourses and voices of the text tell of events, policies and practices that speak of the before, the then, the now and the future; for example, the neglect and death of traditional Australian languages and the usurpation of the mono-Anglo. The conversations are a cultural narrative about collective memory. The process of speak and histories is more than collecting and recreating the histories of the new Australians and their racial attitudes to the first Australians. The many voices give a human value to the stories and histories – it provides a richness to the clash of cultures. The contribution and success of merging Aboriginal oral histories and knowledges into academic scholarship that deals with a diversity of experiences is a testament to the spirit of place which is reflected in this book.

SOVEREIGN SUBJECTS: INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY MATTERS

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Ed.)

Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2007, xvi+240pp, ISBN 978 1 74114 724 7

Reviewed by John Maynard

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This is an excellent publication and will become a much sought-after addition to any library or academic institution. Aileen Morton-Robinson must be congratulated for pulling together this powerful educational resource and it will undoubtedly become the standard on this important topic.

Significantly, all the contributors are Indigenous and this grounds the publication in an Indigenous framework of knowing. The contributors are from diverse fields and backgrounds and offer insight, expertise and knowledge rarely seen in one volume.

The end result they unequivocally deliver is that Indigenous sovereignty of this continent has never been ceded and this most striking and fundamental message ripples through the undercurrents of all these essays.

Discussions of Indigenous sovereignty and a formal treaty have been tabled for over 30 years but successive Federal governments have found the issue far too hard to resolve or ratify. This seems rather strange as during that time Indigenous issues have gained widespread publicity and support, as evidenced by the 1967 Referendum and the Corroboree 2000 walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Sadly, we have not been blessed with a national leader with the courage and conviction to set the country on a path where the injustices of the past and inequalities of the present could be both recognised and dealt with.

The book covers such important areas as law, policy, globalisation, writing, history and health, clearly demonstrating the depth of Indigenous intellectual thought and talent that is currently delivering an Indigenous perspective.

There have been incredible changes across the past 40 years, but the last decade has seen a whittling away at all of these gains and in some instances, particularly with the 'history wars' debate, one at times feels as if the country has been dragged back to the 1950s where an Aboriginal presence in both history and society was barely visible. As a historian myself I was greatly interested in that aspect of this collection.

Tony Birch in his essay has no hesitation in labelling the history war as a "phony war, a brand name and logo to sell books and promote insecure egos" (p.108). This white colonial battlefield and turf war over the past has been waged as a "cultural and ideological war which, in the aftermath of Mabo and subsequent native title legislation, created an ideological panic amongst those in Australia who would prefer that Indigenous people remain in a place of reliance" (p. 108).

Gary Foley delivers an overview of the Aboriginal political fight from a standpoint and insider's view that only he could deliver. It is insightful, enlightening and delivers a word of warning that no political party has truly earned Indigenous trust.

Wendy Brady articulates that the Indigenous fight for sovereignty is an ongoing campaign and is tightly grounded in our background and connection to place and identity. It is the connection to traditional country through family and kinship ties that strengthens our resolve against the impact of colonisation. The full weight of living within a country where we are the marginalised minority and exposed continuously to both the difficulties and danger "of living life simultaneously on two levels: one exists within a white nation that considers itself sovereign, while the other functions as an Indigenous sovereign being" (p.10) is an ongoing dilemma.

I particularly enjoyed Phillip Morrissey's unpacking of Inga Clendinnen's book *Dancing with strangers* (2005). Morrissey exposes the failure of Clendinnen to recognise that her own non-Indigenous background undermines her attempt to achieve an objective view of 1788 and its aftermath.

Similarly, I was struck by Irene Watson's powerful opening that begs one to examine where we are as Indigenous people today. This insightful piece delves deeply into the power structures of this country. Historically and continuing to the present day, Indigenous people have been co-opted either knowingly or unknowingly into undermining positive Indigenous directive, and factions, division and in-fighting have become entrenched and encouraged. This is then feed through the media to enshrine negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people that are the staple of the wider ignorant community. Whether it is sovereignty, treaty, land, children, health, education or any Indigenous issue in this country, we will only effect change when we become a unified people. The Watson paper challenges us all to identify the constructions that have been imposed around us.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson unmask the total unease and guilt that this country continues to carry in relation to the invasion, dispossession and continuing assault upon Aboriginal people and culture. She explores the directives of John Howard, tying this Prime Minister's action to "patriarchal white sovereignty as a regime of power" (p. 87) that seeks misguidedly to impose that we are all one people of equal standing. It is race that remains as the underlying instrument that shapes and directs the "politics of possessive investments in particular white sovereignty, which are often invisible and unnamed in everyday discourse and academic analyses" (p. 101).

Morton-Robinson's critique of John Howard is timely, particularly given the Northern Territory intervention into Aboriginal communities, an imminent election and his confession that it has been his upbringing and age that has handicapped his flawed understanding of Indigenous people and issues. He now argues that only he, if re-elected could bring about a referendum "to see a new statement of reconciliation incorporated into the preamble of the Australian constitution" (*Sydney Morning Herald* 12 October 2007, p. 17).

This latest announcement and its timing seem rather hollow and hypocritical in relation to the man's track record. Reading Morton-Robinson's piece helps unravel some of the complexities of this man and his actions.

In conclusion I have no hesitation in giving this publication a very high recommendation to students, academics and the wider public reader as it is informative, well-researched and most importantly a very good read!

■ References

Clendinnen, I. (2005). *Dancing with strangers*. Melbourne: Text Publishing.

TRUSTEES ON TRIAL: RECOVERING THE STOLEN WAGES

Rosalind Kidd

Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2006, xii+212pp,
ISBN 9780855755461

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Ros Kidd's new book *Trustees on Trial: Recovering the Stolen Wages* is a much-needed contribution to the debate about the treatment of Aboriginal people by the Queensland government for most of the twentieth century and the failure to date to redress past wrongs. It tells a detailed and comprehensive story about mismanagement and gross incompetence in the husbanding of Aboriginal moneys over a long period, right up to the current government.

It's not only what this book says that is valuable, it's what it helps to explain in relation to current Aboriginal disadvantage. If Aboriginal people had had control of their own money, if they had been paid the same as whites, if they had benefited from the various funds set up ostensibly for their benefit, would the situation of gross disadvantage which now exists have occurred? Ros Kidd does not address these questions, but she provides a great deal of detail about the role of the government and the public service in creating today's situation which helps the reader to place current disadvantage in context. It also helps explain the refusal of many Aboriginal people to accept the \$2000 or \$4000 offered by the Beattie government to workers who had never received money earned by them due to government intervention in their lives. Such an offer was an insult, a denial of the extent of Aboriginal losses, individually and as a community, throughout the whole "protection" period during which government supposedly acted as a parent or guardian to Aboriginal people.

What rankles most for me, I think, is that the government (by which I mean both politicians and public servants) acted irresponsibly, negligently, maliciously or just plain incompetently while at the same time taking away Aborigines' power to run their own lives on the grounds that they were not capable of looking after their own interests. These sins were