



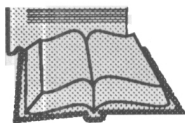
The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Dominance 1788-1994

R. Broome

Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994 (2nd edn), 275 pp.

Aboriginal Australia: An Introductory Reader in Aboriginal Studies

C. Bourke, E. Bourke and W. Edwards (Eds)

University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1994, 236 pp.

Reviewed by Geoffrey Gray, Research Fellow (History), AIATSIS

Both of these books are introductory texts for Aboriginal history and studies; both are directed towards students, teachers and a more general audience although *Aboriginal Australia* is far more specific, designed to act as a text for Aboriginal Studies and is an outcome of the Open Learning course, 'Aboriginal Studies: Aboriginal Australia', produced by the University of South Australia, where the three editors work.

Aboriginal Australia presents selected themes that relate to Indigenous Australians against a background of traditional, colonial and contemporary experiences. Through the examination of particular facets of the lives of Indigenous Australians, the struggle to maintain identity and heritage within the frame of mainstream Australian society is revealed.

Aboriginal Australians tells the story of invasion, dispossession, settlement and development from a colonial outpost to an affluent industrial society. It seeks to tell the story from the viewpoint of the dispossessed, what it calls the 'original Australians'. Richard Broome has done a second edition of his successful 1982 *Aboriginal Australians*. He has not rewritten the early chapters although he has added a chapter, 'Ambivalent times', which covers events since 1980. The blurb on the dust jacket tells us that it is the 'only concise and up-to-date survey of Aboriginal history since 1788'. It is perhaps this claim which creates a problem. It is not Aboriginal history but rather a white history of

relations between Aborigines and the State (in its various guises) since 1788. Since 1982 there has been considerable debate about Aboriginal history: what it is and who can write it.¹ Broome glides over the debate and ignores the problematic nature of writing Aboriginal history.

While it is commendable that Broome feels that there is little that he would disagree with although increasing his awareness and knowledge of some themes, this in itself is not sufficient for a rewrite. I think it is here that he fails his readers, especially in light of its claim to be the only concise and up-to-date survey. Adding a chapter, valuable as it is, and providing an enlarged bibliography of major sources is not enough.

As a consequence we are left, for example, with a first chapter about 'Traditional life' which ignores, both textually and bibliographically, recent anthropological discourse about 'traditional life'. His reading list about 'traditional society' ignores, for example, the significant contribution made by Myers (1986) and the consequent debate. There is no indication in the enlarged bibliography that he has noted the flood of material on Aboriginal anthropology. A similar comment can be made about the other chapters. In Chapter 6, 'Racism enshrined', he suggests a useful survey of racism is K.R. McConnochie's *Realities of Race: An Analysis of the Concepts of Race and Racism and Their Relevance to Australian Society* (1973). Two points: firstly, even Keith McConnochie no longer

¹ See Bain Attwood (1994) 'The paradox of Australian Aboriginal history'. *Thesis* 11(38): 117-137 for a comprehensive survey; both Attwood and Steve Hemming in Bourke *et al.* (Eds) provide an extensive bibliography.

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prescribes his own book on any reading list; secondly, since that book was written, there have been several others which are more up-to-date and relevant to the debate about 'race' and 'racism', including the recent book by McConnochie, David Hollinsworth and Jan Pettman, *Race and Racism in Australia* (1988). Chapter 8, 'Aborigines and the cattle industry', is weakened if for no other reason than that there is no reference, in the 'Guide to major sources ... since the first edition', to Ronald and Catherine Berndt's *End of an Era* (1987), a major study on the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory, or to Deborah Bird Rose's *Hidden Histories* (1991).

It is perhaps indicative of what seems on the surface a smug satisfaction that nothing much needs to be done that, in the bibliography, there is reference to journals that are either no longer published or have changed — such as *Identity*, which Broome recommends from '1971 to date' although its last issue was around the time *Aboriginal Australians* was first published; or *Mankind*, which underwent a name change (now *TAJA*) in 1991. A simple revision of the texts recommended may have alleviated such problems.

Bourke, Bourke and Edwards' *Aboriginal Australia* is, on the other hand, specific in audience reach. At the University of South Australia, it is one of the recommended texts for students undertaking the first-year subject, 'Aboriginal Culture and History'. Although it is possible to read on its own, it is considerably enhanced when read in conjunction with the Open Learning course. Its other main disappointment is that many of the contributors have undertaken little original research and therefore it resonates with secondary sources.

It claims to present positive perspectives of Indigenous people; its central aim to present a 'realistic view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'. Yet there is no chapter that deals specifically with Torres Strait Islander history, culture or contemporary life. And, without an index, it is even harder to locate those pages which mention Torres Strait Islander people. Moreover, when Torres Strait Islander people are mentioned in the text, they are usually lumped together with Aboriginal people. This tends to obscure different

histories and historical links. For example, in Chapter 3, 'Australia's first peoples: identity and population', there are only two references to Torres Strait Islander people (pp. 43 and 46). The first quote is from Lois O'Donoghue 'Australia is a big country. We come from the north, south, east and west of Australia, Torres Strait and Tasmania' (*sic*). The other reference is in similar vein from ex-senator Neville Bonner:

All persons who desire to be classified as indigenous, regardless of hue of skin and who have flowing in their veins any portion, however small, of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander blood are indigenous people. It does not necessarily follow that ... the lightness of one's skin necessarily indicates a lessening knowledge of, and belief in, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture and tradition.

There are no references to works on Torres Strait culture and history. It is hoped that future editions will correct this oversight.

Aboriginal Australia is written simply. Its language is simple and the authors seem unsure of the sophistication of their audience. The superficial simplicity of the presentation at times generates problems for which the authors themselves provide no insight. This is problematic as the book is an introductory reader. An example: 'English is not an Australian language, even though it is Australia's national language and is used as a lingua franca, or common language'. The contributions are patchy and it is unclear why many of the chapters are jointly written; the reader is not provided with an explanation. There is considerable cross-referencing to other writers (especially the editors) in the book. The reader is provided with a comprehensive introduction to the editors albeit the other contributors are given only their current status.

Broome attempts to provide us with a comprehensive history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations from 1788. It is a pity that he declined an opportunity to update his text. Bourke *et al.* (Eds) suffers in comparison. Its aims are met but it is presented too simply even for an introductory reader. It is hoped that future editions will seek to improve the scholarship and provide an index. A text without an index is hard work!

References

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Desert Aborigines. Canberra and Washington: Aboriginal Studies Press and Smithsonian Institution Press.

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Australian Indigenous Resources Project

Maja Risker

Northern Territory Library

The Northern Territory Library is currently creating a database to identify where various holdings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources and material are located across Australia, what resources are held and types of access to these collections. This database will be accessible via the Internet.

Where possible and acceptable, we hope to create links to established databases and/or web sites which will provide more detailed information about the relevant resources and/or organisation. The end result will be an Australia-wide search facility encompassing a broad range of organisations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources.

We are sending out a brief questionnaire to supply us with enough information to provide an overview of the resources held across Australia.

If you would like a copy of the questionnaire or more information about the Australian Indigenous Resources Project, please send email to maja.risler@nt.gov.au or write to:

**Australian Indigenous Resources
Northern Territory Library
PO Box 42
Darwin NT 0801**

Additional Information

Aims

Our aim is to:

- a) enable users to easily **search** Australia for organisations which hold materials/resources relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and identify what they hold
- b) allow users to easily **locate** organisations holding specialised collections relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and discover what resources they hold
- c) facilitate **access** to other databases and web sites providing details of collections and organisations relevant to Indigenous Australians.

'Resources' may be defined as any item created by, for or about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and held in a particular area on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. Items include archives, craft works, monographs, serials, theses, manuscripts, films, videos, sound recordings, photographs, artefacts and any other items that form part of a resource/collection relating to Aboriginal people.