BLACK AUSTRALIA 2

An annotated bibliography and teacher's guide to resources on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, 1977–82

Marji Hill and Alex Barlow
CONTACT HISTORY

Introduction
A celebration of resistance to colonialism

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Many of us are now imbued with the sense of being ambassadors for our people whether within Australia or overseas. The National Aboriginal Conference delegates to the United Nations Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in Geneva last year were ambassadors for the Aboriginal people. We will again be ambassadors this year when the National Aboriginal Conference hosts the Third General Assembly of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in Canberra.

Just as colonised peoples and oppressed indigenous peoples have insisted that their history and cultures are their own to be portrayed and represented by their own people, Aboriginal people are reclaiming their history and culture. We are the guardians and custodians of our history and culture, and it is our responsibility to pass onto future generations our set of truths.

Justifiably, Aboriginal people regard the white vision of history since colonisation as colonialist propaganda, as a denial of our set of truths. We have never concealed defeat: our resistance must therefore continue in the realm of history as well as in the political forums.

The cultural nature of our claim: custodians of our cultures

 White historians have debated such issues as 'objectivity' and standpoint in history. Our approach to history is not a point of view but a worldview. White historians debate the nature of the historical facts. Our ways of establishing fact are distinctively our own. Our history is legend, tradition, story, myth-making, song, painting, dance.

The Aboriginal technique of telling history is a particular cultural form, as valid as any other, including white historiography. Our tradition is an oral one, and the recital of our past takes place within a linguistic and cultural structure as yet largely misunderstood by white historians. In the same way

that white people would not tamper with the structure and form of the Iliad, the Odyssey, Chaucer's Tales, or Shakespeare, Aboriginal people do not want our oral history to be tampered with.

Overzealous white historians and editors have altered the structure and form of Aboriginal stories, myths and oral records to make them more comprehensible to a white audience, but have thereby made them incomprehensible to Aboriginal audiences. People say, 'That doesn't sound right to me'. Only we can recognise the Aboriginality of a piece of work. When the cutes, the repetitions, the language, the distinctively Aboriginal evocations of our experience are removed from the recitals of our people, the truth is lost for us. The form and structure will not be passed on to others and they are denied the right to look after the heritage and in turn to pass it on.

 Similarly, non-verbal communication is an aspect of Aboriginal tradition to which few white people are sensitised. Often Aboriginal reticence is interpreted by whites as a lack of knowledge. It may be in fact deference to the appropriate person who 'owns' the story and has the right to tell the story. Spatial relationships, where and how one sits, the culture, specific notion of good manners — when to leave, what to bring and so on, are matters which Aboriginal people know best. In many parts of Australia, conversations are conducted in sign language, unknown to white observers. When the sense of the story, the atmosphere, is related in sign language, white historians can entirely miss the point.

Aboriginal cultural concepts, often expressed in English restrictions such as 'share', 'country', 'poor thing' and so on, are glossed over or dismissed. Just as students of English literature seek out the levels and nuances of meaning in their literature, Aboriginal people enjoy language games and nuances of expression.

Aboriginal chronology takes many forms, but particularly a cyclical or spiralling one. It is not a consecutive numerical form. When old people talk to young people, they refer to a point on a cycle as a referent the old person has lived through that age 'when you were a little fella' and is relating to the younger the path he has already trodden. It is easy to miss the connection that is being made in these situations. Time is broken up into periods along the line of ages, age-grades, times between floods and so on. Because many of the older people did not have recorded birthdays, the officials gave them standard birthdays, such as 26 January or the 1 June, and simply guessed the year. When we speak to many

older people, we do not refer to years, but find some other way of locating an event.

Because Aboriginal chronology is imprecise, it is dismissed, and this is just another way of denying us a say about our past.

The matters discussed so far may be interpreted as relating mainly to oral history. But we argue that these political and cultural matters are crucial to written Aboriginal history. Our response to the traditional written sources of history will be dependent on our worldview. White historians cannot see the documentation of massacres, of reserve legislation and administration, the parliamentary debates, the newspaper reports, etcetera, from our worldview. Our ancestors, relations and kinfolk lived and died while white administrators tried for 190 years to come to terms with Aboriginal people, stumbling from one bankrupt policy to another, from one legislative measure to another. Aboriginal people will look at these documents and come to quite different conclusions, in the main, from white historians, because we are ultimately responsible to 'our own mob', and not to the discipline of history nor the white concept of knowledge.

Aboriginal themes of history differ, as well as our theses and methodology, from the non-Aboriginal ones. Our spiritual values, our respect for our ancestors and relations, our concern to preserve our family histories and our understanding and attachment to this land are the basic stuff of Aboriginal historical research. Our considerations are genealogical closeness to and distance from the characters, the geographical distance between them, traditional origins, events and happenings of common interest such as plenty and starvation, births and deaths, rains, fires and floods, where our relations came from and where they went to, associations in institutions, on reserves, missions, stations, and all these are culturally loaded. That a famous white figure was on the same station as an Aboriginal character in our researches would not have the same weight or meaning as for a white version of that person. Aboriginal historians are writing history for Aboriginal people, for the cultural and political reasons we have explained, for our families and children.

This brings us to the matter of responsibility and authority in history. Most Aboriginal historians will be concerned with their own family histories, and with events in their own 'country'. This is because they inherit the right from their families to record this history and to write it. Aboriginal people know what can be passed on and to whom. This responsibility to
family, kin and community is keenly felt. Our relations will edit and correct our versions of history and participate in the version of our histories which will be passed onto our children as our set of truths. Aboriginal people largely mistrust white historians because they know they cannot pass on all information in trust, and that they cannot participate in arriving at the final satisfactory form. It is well known that many white academics have had few scruples about publishing information which is not for public consumption, although the situation has improved lately.

The most tragic aspect of Aboriginal history has been the forced separation of families and particularly the separation of children from their parents. In the assimilation era, children with some white ancestry were separated from their parents and removed to "half-caste" camps in either the remoter areas and often on islands. Others were rechristened, because their mothers were allegedly "neglecting the children" or allegedly "the parents wanted it that way". This was a brutal measure to prevent Aboriginal people from passing on their cultural and historical heritage. We are reclaiming our right to identify and define ourselves.

Central to this aim is the prevention of cultural theft. Aboriginal people who have told their stories to whites have too many times not been deemed to be authors. For instance, there is a book called Joe Nangan's Dreaming by Hugh Edwards. Whose dreaming and ... by whom? This is only one of the dozens of books which dehumanize and infringe Aboriginal people.

Most of this country has been taken from our people in a little over 190 years of colonization. In the same period, our land, has been a cultural repression denying us our identity in Australian history. We, as Aboriginal people, can begin to rectify the white misconceptions about our history by writing it ourselves. Colonization was not a peaceful process, nor have we conceded defeat.

Annamuotions

179. The ABORGINELS of the Canberra region. (6th) Canberra, Educational Media Services, ACT Schools Authority, 1982. 5 multilith cards, 7 multilith flipstrip programmes, 7 books. 1 map, OHPs, 1 teachers manual, 1 teaching strategies chart.

It is often said of Tasmania's Aborigines that never before in history was an indigenous population so quickly annihilated by an invading, migrant population. On a world scale this may be disputed, but in Australia it can certainly be disputed! The evidence is, in fact, that every Aboriginal frontier the invasion was swift and violent. This kit has Aborigines first coming into contact with white settlers in 1830 and the last known woman of full Aboriginal descent dying in 1897. At least six Aborigines were employed by the Tasmanians and we have some record of their culture and language. Of the Ngunnawal people of the Canberra-Monaro region, as this kit demonstrates, we know practically nothing. The compilers of the kit, therefore, are to be congratulated on finding so much material and packaging it into such an effective teaching unit. Two major drawbacks of the kit, however, are that the former's lectures to the story of the Ngunnawal people of the other side of the surrounding people of the area, and it doesn't include the story of the people of Wreck Bay, which is an essential part of our cultural history. The greatest sins part of the introductory material are references to the "Aborigines" and labels itself 'The Aborigines of the Canberra Region' should surely, too, have made some reference to Canberra's present-day Aboriginal population. As a result, it is unbalanced.

Curriculum Development Centre, PO Box 52, Dickson, ACT 2602.

Usable

UP$ 10

180. Armstrong, R.E.M.

The Kaladzoo: a study of an Aboriginal tribe on the Queensland frontier. Brisbane, Brosam, n.d. [1980] 288pp. illus. maps. Tales of the struggles of the Kaladzoo in their effort to resist the colonists, missionaries, and traders in the area. While the author does not mention the close contact between the two cultures and are in need of good editing. More thought could have been given into designing an educational publication that was attractive and likely to have some kind of audience appeal. Overall, this is a poor quality publication and the printing, layout and design are shoddy. A lot of information, especially of an anthropological nature, is confused — see for example, the comments on 'ancestors' and 'range'. Then there is the all too frequent use of dated anthropological terms. Of course we also mention the cultural use of terms from both which have nothing to do with the text.

Minimal use

US$/T 10.00

181. Barwick, Diane, ed.

Handbook for Aboriginal and Islander history. Edited by Diane Barwick, Michael Macar and Tom Stanage. Canberra, Aboriginal History, 1979. 187pp. Since 1788 there have been two versions of Australian history. Unfortunately, it has been the white history that has predominated. In an effort to correct this imbalance this handbook has been designed to promote Aboriginal oral history, for the is this other version of Australian history. The advice given in this handbook will assist Aborigines to make their own permanent written records of their oral history. It is also an excellent guide for researchers using oral evidence. A wide variety of topics, sources of information and techniques for research are shared by experienced researchers and other experts.

Highly recommended

US$/T

182. Blake, Les


Clashes between early settlers and Aborigines, particularly on the Victorian/N.S.W. border, are the backdrop for this short descriptive narrative material. The book was published in 1962 under the command of Captain Dana. This was the response to the increasing resistance by Aborigines to the invaders of their lands. The Native Police were used against their people to protect the settlers. A lot of mid-nineteenth century attitudes towards Aborigines can be found in this assessment of line based accounts on which this book is based. It is therefore a must read for those interested in the introduction to place the content into historical and social perspective would have been useful. As it is the focus is on Captain Dana and details of the actual Native Police Corps.

Usable

US$/T 10

183. Bloomsfield, Geoffrey

Baal behobe: the end of the dancing ... Chipendale, N.S.W., Apod, 1961. 148pp. illus.

Igsues the first and last sections of this book concentrate on the middle sections for it is these that can be recommended. The author has drawn together a very important and valuable collection of sources that relates to the massacres and violence that took place among Aborigines and settlers in the watershed of three adjacent rivers in N.S.W. — the Hastings, the Manning and the Macleay. This book is a series of statements by perceptive early settlers on Aborigines, their relationship with the newly arrived settlers and the consequences of this contact. As Robinson says, "the events of the past are not only history to us, but to the present as well. As a result we must take the responsibility for these events and in so far as we can, understand our reputation, our history and our national psyche is the disgraceful story of how our ancestors stole from the first Australian people, of their self respect and, more often than not, their very lives. We all need to know about it." For this reason the book should be read. However, the first and last sections need careful scrutiny and examination. The focus is on the Hastings is weak anthropologically. In addition the author maintains a 'tragic savage' attitude towards Aborigines and reflects in this in the way the title of the book relates to the situation from The Colonial Research Society, 7 Reginald Street, Armidale, NSW, 2350.

Usable

US$/T 19.00

184. Bloomfield, Richard

Aboriginal Australians: black responses to white dominance, 1788-1890, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1982. 227pp. illus. map. (The Australian experience)

The sort of historical text that serves Aboriginal studies courses well — especially those at the CAE level although the book could be used and read by secondary students. Its chief value lies in its suitability as a well integrated and basic text, and in its success with students who has already demonstrated a capacity to handle and evaluate this sort of historical information of black/white relations in this country. Quite successfully, he traces the Aboriginal response to the European Invasion, the subsequent dispossession of Aborigines, and the control of their destinies by the Europeans.

Recommended

US$/T/T paper $ 8.95

185. CREE, Nicholas

Oyster Cove: last home of the Tasmanian Aboriginal. Toorak, Vic., CREE, written at length about the lives of the Truganini. As a history of Oyster Cove this account is fascinating. The chapters on the tragic end of the Aboriginal survivors of Robinson's genocidal campaigns made me read. The book's rawness, transport us to the history. Its weaknesses are in its prehistory and its anthropology. There is no evidence, for instance, that Aborigines here were ever busy in art, to build the 'face' or to establish fields. Nor is there any evidence that Tasmanian Aboriginals lived from 'sea-to-wet southern India about ten thousand years ago. But to everyone who is interested in learning about the lives of these people they certainly wouldn't have been able to walk all the way to Tasmania! It is unfortunate, too, that the author supports the belief that all links with the original Truganini ceased with the death of Truganini. Read the book, then, for its account of settlement at Oyster Cove, but look elsewhere for Tasmania's prehistory and for the anthropology of people.

Some parts usable

US$

186. Crichton, Ian


The focus of this history is on the period from about 1860 to 1918. It is a useful study based on official records. The detailed information on the contact history of a specific place makes the book invaluable. It is a history course, for Victoria in particular. One learns of the Framingham's establishment and subsequent closure of Framinghams Station, of the general attitudes of the day and the living conditions of Aborigines. The history has an added value because of its topical interest; Framinghams Aboriginals got national media recognition when they made the Framinghams claim. The author uses care with the choice of her terminology as 'half castes', 'pure' and 'full bloods' are inappropriate terms.

Recommended

US$/T

paper $4.95

187. The FORGOTTEN people: a history of the Australian South Sea Island community, from the ABC Broadcast radio series. Sydney University Press, 1979. 92pp. illus. (Pacific Islanders have lived in Australia for centuries, but they are still a 'forgotten people'. This is their story, told as far as possible in their own words. Historians and popular writers have chosen to highlight the miseries and hardships of the Pacific Islanders but Islanders themselves have seldom been able to tell their own stories (p.5).