Book Reviews


*Sovereign Subjects* draws together 12 essays about Indigenous sovereignty by Indigenous scholars. Gathered in the first collection of its kind, these essays protest the failure of Labor and Coalition governments, Australian courts and academics to respect Indigenous rights as politically, culturally and individually sovereign people/s. They do so at an important moment, when the Rudd government seems poised to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Mobilising law, post-colonial literature, history and politics, each essay stakes a claim to sovereignty – a sovereignty that scholars and politicians may not recognise, but which they should not dismiss.

The book is broken into four parts. In ‘Law matters’, Irene Watson exposes native title and the ‘patriarchal white model of ATSIC’ (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) as parodies of rights ‘cannibalising’ Aboriginal society (Chapter 1). Phillip Falk and Gary Martin argue that the bases of Indigenous sovereignty – land rights, economic resources, rights of cultural heritage, customary law, education and a treaty – pose no real threat to Australia’s integrity as a sovereign nation (Chapter 2). Henrietta Marrie protests the theft and destruction of Indigenous sovereignty over ecological knowledge by scientists and farmers (Chapter 3).

In ‘Writing matters’, Indigenous scholars of literature invite us to rethink the notion of sovereignty itself. Philip Morrissey uses Inga Clendinnen’s *Dancing with Strangers* to exemplify hidden colonialism, Eurocentrism and self-protection in the work of well-meaning settler writers. He does so to remind us of the daily violence done to Indigenous sovereignty understood as a ‘corporeal fact’ rather than a ‘political strategy’ (Chapter 4, p. 73). Tracey Bunda finds ‘sovereign positions’ in Indigenous women’s writing wherein ‘big, black, bold and centred’ Indigenous women ‘exist to counter the coloniser’ by protecting themselves and their kin from colonial scrutiny (Chapter 5, pp. 75, 85). Aileen Moreton-Robinson shows how John Howard’s discourses of territorial sovereignty, borders, nation and unity ‘write off’ Aborigines, redoubling the erosive effects of colonialism on Indigenous people in Australia (Chapter 6).

In ‘History matters’, Tony Birch shows that left-wing Australian historians are complicit in the 200-year-old effort to ‘exterminate both the physical and social body of Indigenous people from national historical memory’ (Chapter 7, p. 110). Gary Foley tells a history of the Australian Labor Party’s historical and continuing campaign against Indigenous self-determination (Chapter 8). Wendy Brady asks us what sort of national sovereignty could lead the Australian public to assume that ‘equal opportunity’ justifies the destruction of ‘Indigenous land title rights’. Land, she argues, is
essential to Indigenous existence. It is ‘embedded in the fabric of our being and spirituality and that forms our identity’ (Chapter 9, p. 151).

In ‘Policy matters’, Maggie Walters catalogues the recent Neo-Liberal onslaught against Indigenous rights in Australia – the abolition of ATSIC, the stagnation of Indigenous Australian health, the mainstreaming of Indigenous services, and the ‘new racism’ (Chapter 10). Steve Larkin argues for Indigenous sovereignty over research into Indigenous health (Chapter 11). Darryl Cronin reminds us that ‘welfare dependence’ and Howard’s call for ‘mutual obligation’ are two prongs of a very old strategy of settler colonialism that robs Indigenous people of control over their lives and their labour (Chapter 12).

This collection should be widely read. Its power lies less in new ideas, history and legal argument than in its sustained intervention into current cultural politics in Australia. The act of gathering Australian Indigenous scholars together to intervene in academic and political debates about Indigenous rights results in a powerful call for Indigenous self-determination in every spectrum of Indigenous life. As a whole, this book is a very accessible and telling reminder of the way that settlers both in academia and government continue to deny Indigenous sovereignty. Its most important contribution, in my view, is the refusal of its authors to allow the academy, the courts or politicians to define what sovereignty means. They confront us instead with what sovereignty should, could or does mean to them and to Indigenous communities. Sovereignty here is Indigenous separateness, it is Indigenous self-hood, it is a political agenda, it is a legal right, it is Indigenous identity. In its every iteration, Sovereign Subjects declares that Indigenous sovereignty is extant and under attack by the Australian settler state.

Reference

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The term ‘civil rights’ conjures images of mass protests, restaurant and bus protests, and passionate speeches – all acted out in an American context – with no reference to Australia. This is partly a tribute to the power of American film and also of the extraordinary legend of Martin Luther King, which is only recently undergoing a reevaluation. Yet in the last 50 years Indigenous Australians also experienced a massive change in their civil freedoms as longstanding federal and state discriminatory legislation was dismantled between the late 1950s and 1960s and, in the case of recalcitrant Queensland, into the 1970s. John Chesterman seeks to supplant the US civil rights movement in our minds by telling the Australian story. His mission, however, is not a narrative of
change, which he does well, but to investigate and analyse how this change came about. His argument challenges what he detects as an indifference to this rights movement in mainstream histories and the tendency to explain it as a product of the assimilation policy and as initiated as a matter of course by governments. To the contrary, Chesterman argues that like the American case, rights were won from mostly reluctant governments, by activists – black and white – whose rhetoric of freedom appealed to international conventions and played on a growing concern over Australia’s international reputation.

Chesterman’s book is a comprehensive account of the gaining of civil rights. It is a complex story, clearly told, ranging over both federal and state spheres and most issues. It was one fought over a period of several decades with no one moment of victory, no stand out leader, no ‘I have a dream’ speech, to give drama and purchase to the story. As with the achievement of white male democratic rights in Australia over 100 years earlier, the Australian civil rights story lacked a moment that gave it a narrative coherence for, as Chesterman rightly points out, the 1967 Referendum was not a civil rights landmark. Yet despite this lack of drama, Chesterman tells an engaging story of the changes. He also argues convincingly that in all spheres, with perhaps the exception of South Australia during the Don Dunstan era, governments were pressured into granting civil rights by numerous activists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who quoted chapter and verse of United Nations conventions.

Chesterman’s arguments are supported by a wealth of documentation from government archives, although the lack of other sources leaves the activists as shadowy figures. Occasionally the overarching approach of the analysis by necessity misses some of the local nuances. For instance, although he refers to activist submissions, he attributes the reformist Victorian legislation of 1958 to the desire for administrative efficiency. However, this overlooks the long campaign by Aboriginal and other activists against the Protection Board and, perhaps surprisingly, Henry Bolte’s own determination to change the Act.

Chesterman’s book is valuable not only for telling this story, but because he evaluates the ‘liberal promise’ of this movement to end discrimination. Pertinent to this is his discussion of the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act 1975 and the debate over differential treatment and special rights, which so exercised the minds of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party and Prime Minister John Howard’s Coalition Government. Chesterman adds to the debate on Aboriginal disadvantage and concludes that Australian governments have perceived civil rights mostly in terms of a paradigm of ‘formal equality’ rather than ‘substantive equality’. This, he argues, is why the notion of rights has not been seen by many as relevant to the situation of Aboriginal disadvantage, and why interest has been almost entirely in individual rights and equality of opportunity, rather than Indigenous rights and equality of outcome. Chesterman sees this being played out in a context of an Australian preference for power being located in government not the court, and a related antipathy to a bill of rights. Intended or not, he points out that this preference has maintained the hegemony of the settler majority, who may not win in court but who will always win in parliament.
All these issues are clearly and cogently argued in a readable and important book, which is fully referenced and well indexed. It has been professionally produced by University of Queensland Press.

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Rights and Redemption seeks to do a number of things. It provides an insight into areas where Aboriginal people have sought to use the Australian legal system to secure rights and recognition. It critiques the way in which the law engages with the history and traditions of Aboriginal people in those contexts. Finally, it seeks to make a case for the particular role historians can play in those contexts. In my view the first of those three endeavours is achieved very well, the other two slightly less so.

The authors look at five broad areas where Aboriginal culture and history have been analysed and dissected in courts of law in attempts to achieve justice and recognition on the terms of the dominant culture. Native title occupies three chapters, starting with Mabo and then exploring the role of historians and historical evidence in ten further cases reviewed for this book. Yorta Yorta dominates the discussion for its pivotal role in interpreting s223 of the Native Title Act and thereby setting the evidentiary benchmark for future cases, and also for the court’s controversial approach to history (without the involvement of any expert historians). Many other cases are canvassed, including Bennel, De Rose, Risk and Rubibi.

One chapter each is devoted to other important court cases. During the 1990s, the question of whether Aboriginal people were victims of genocide was taken to court unsuccessfully in two attempts to have the Australian government held responsible for past and present actions. The attempts by individuals to obtain some recompense for the suffering they experienced as a result of having been removed from their families were also largely unsuccessful, although that chapter does end with the successful Trevorrow case of 2007. In that case the plaintiff was awarded compensation for psychological suffering caused by his unlawful removal as a child. The Hindmarsh Island affair, already well documented, is also discussed. In that case Ngarrindjeri people sought to protect an area of significance to them by using available heritage legislation. They failed in the attempt and the developers then tried to sue the consultant anthropologist and a Commonwealth minister for damages they felt the protection process had caused them, also unsuccessfully. The final case study concerns legal challenges among Aboriginal people of each other’s Aboriginality in relation to ATSIC elections in Tasmania.

While personally familiar with the native title issues and Hindmarsh Island, the other cases were new to me and made for very interesting and accessible reading. The authors’ critique of the approach of lawyers and especially judges to history addressed some important points, but overall left me somewhat dissatisfied. The main shortcoming is that much of the critique is structured around the straw horse of a black letter legal approach to history that is argued to undermine any attempt at a genuine, contextual engagement with history. In Chapter six the authors develop two concepts around which they pursue this critique: ‘redemptive history’ and ‘legal history. Redemptive history refers to history’s power to provide a narrative of the past that allows past injustices to be acknowledged and by doing so can cause actions to be taken in the present that re-establish some form of genuine justice. For redemptive history to work in the Australian context a key ingredient is that it must allow for and actively draw on the oral histories of Aboriginal people. It seeks to provide the context in which the paper trail commonly associated with Anglo-European history can be understood. Legal history, on the other hand, refers to historical inquiry conducted by lawyers, or at least entirely on terms determined by the law, in which the textual record is considered to be the final word, self-contained and not requiring further context. Within this approach to history the work of one observer (Curr) of 19th-century Yorta Yorta people can have more evidentiary weight than the testimony of all the contemporary Yorta Yorta people put together. Similarly, in the Cubillo stolen generation case this approach to history enabled the thumbprint of an illiterate mother on a departmental consent form to be interpreted as her informed consent without consideration of the context in which that print would have been obtained.

I share the authors’ concern with this judicial approach to history, including the historical ethnographic record, which often becomes ‘gospel’ before the court. What I found less compelling was the proposition that there is such a thing as ‘legal history’. The court of law is generally a very conservative environment, and existing precedents, be they legal or historical are not readily dismissed. The authors’ research itself, however, revealed numerous instances where judges have taken an approach that leads to ‘redemptive history’. Trevorrow, Rubibi and Shaw are just some of the examples canvassed in this book. Rather than treating those cases as exceptions to the common legal approach, I think the book could have been enriched by providing a more nuanced analysis of what may have led some judges to take a more contextual and, in the authors’ view, more appropriate approach to history. Was it personal predilection? I noticed, for example, that Justice O’Loughlin (who featured in three cases) seemed consistently to take a ‘legal history’ approach, while Justice Merkel (who also featured in three cases) took a ‘redemptive history’ approach just as consistently. Was it perhaps the nature of the arguments put before the court? This fundamental aspect of the legal process is not discussed at all in the book, but the approach taken by different judges in different cases may have been determined largely by the arguments put by the opposing parties. In native title cases, it is certainly the case that when the respondent parties do not oppose a claim, judges commonly take a very relaxed approach to evidence, looking only for essentials.

Regarding the contribution historians can make to the legal process, I am aware from my own workplace that lawyers frequently view history with some skepticism. The authors’ interviews with judges confirmed that many judges struggled to see what
interpretive expertise historians added that judges themselves did not have. There is no doubt that historical research is considered valuable, especially in the complex cases concerning Aboriginal land rights, heritage and identity that are discussed in this book. But many lawyers view the historian’s usefulness as being his or her expertise and persistence in accessing and collating archival information so as to make it available to the court. They are more circumspect about acknowledging historians as experts who can interpret and analyse the collated information in ways that others, especially lawyers, could not. The premise behind this view is that facts should speak for themselves, at least the kinds of facts that historians deal with, which are most commonly government and other historical files.

The authors, understandably, argue that historians do provide special expertise and techniques in interpreting documents. Apart from making such statements, however, I did not really find any examples in the book that made me understand what those techniques might look like. It seemed to me from the cases discussed that different historians had different approaches to interpreting the historical record, not unlike the different judges. The reception the expert historian met from the judge seemed to depend more on the judge’s approach to history, than on the historian’s. Thus, while one judge was dismissive of a historian’s contextual history, another embarked on an exercise of contextual history all on his own, bringing into the discussion documents not referred to by any party.

Despite these minor criticisms on my part, this is a clearly written and well researched book that should provide essential reading for anybody involved in the legal arena of Aboriginal affairs or anybody wanting to understand this area of interaction between Aboriginal people and the dominant society. The legal arena is perhaps the dominant battlefield of the ongoing colonisation of Australia and this book provides many insights into the experience of Aboriginal people in this field and into the manner in which Anglo-Australian culture continues to struggle to understand and formally recognise Aboriginal culture and our historical treatment of Aboriginal people.

References

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Mounted Constable William Willshire has received considerable attention from Northern Territory historians, most notably Austin Stapleton who, as the authors of this new
book point out, defines Willshire in terms that the man himself would have approved.¹ Gordon Reid and Bill Wilson remember him mainly as a ruthless killer of Aborigines in the cause of pastoral expansion during the 1880s and early 1890s.² Reid does note his uncharacteristic concern for sick, blind and crippled Aborigines at Alice Springs and Wilson implicitly questions his mental balance. However, like other historians who have touched on Willshire’s life, they consider him briefly as a small player in a much wider narrative. This new book examines the man and the forces behind him with a new depth and, for the most part, clarity. The book begins with the Kaytetye attack of February 1874 on the Barrow Creek telegraph station, which resulted in the deaths of two telegraphists and, in the indiscriminate police-led revenge that followed, the killing of between 50 and 90 Aborigines. This set a precedent that lasted until public outrage forced an end to such barbarism after the Coniston massacres of 1928; and it implicitly sanctioned many a secret killing by pastoralists in clearing the land of Aborigines to make way for cattle. Such murders continued in remote areas of Central Australia long after the cattle-killing and revenge cycle on the older stations had shaded into the era when local Aborigines became a vital station labour force. Wholesale killings of Alyawarr people at Frew River and Ooratippra around the time of Australian Federation illustrate this point.

Into this volatile Centralian scene came Willshire, transferred to Alice Springs in 1882 after six years of police service in South Australia. In 1884 he was authorised to raise a native police force. With the aid of this band and the solid backing of Centralian pastoralists, he and his closest collaborator, MC Erwin Wurmbrand, became the main Aboriginal exterminators of the region. Central Australia’s most authoritative historian, Dick Kimber, has estimated that at least 500 and possibly as many as 1000 Aborigines were shot within a radius of 300 kilometres from Alice Springs between 1881 and 1891. Willshire’s men probably accounted for the majority. Willshire survived an official inquiry in 1890, apparently unscathed, basically because the hearsay evidence of his missionary accusers was discounted. But in the following year he was arrested, taken to Port Augusta and tried for the murders of two Aboriginal men, known to whites as ‘Donkey’ and ‘Roger’, at Tempe Downs station. Despite overwhelming evidence that Willshire had ordered his troopers to kill these men, he was acquitted – a shameful episode in the legal history of South Australia. Yet he had become an embarrassment to the government. They could not risk returning him to the Centre and did not want him anywhere near Adelaide. In 1893 he and Aboriginal trackers were sent to the Victoria River district to track cattle killers. His methods there followed his earlier practice, but with less success in the broken, bush-clad Victoria River Downs country than he had enjoyed in the Centralian plains. He asked for a recall, was granted it in 1895, lingered in the South Australian police until 1908, then resigned to become a night watchman until his death in 1925.

In the Name of the Law follows Willshire’s police career from beginning to end; but the main – and most telling – sections of the book examine carefully the evidence given at the 1890 Inquiry and at Willshire’s 1891 murder trial, plus Willshire’s own writings. These consisted of three short books, The Aborigines of Central Australia (1888), A Thrill-

ing Tale of Real Life in the Wilds of Australia (1895) and The Land of the Dawning (1896). All this material is well placed within the context of its times. The grim connotations of white frontier attitudes emerge clearly from the contemptuous dismissal of Aboriginal evidence in the 1890 inquiry and Willshire’s murder trial, in the solid backing given him by the pastoral lobby and in the general adulation that greeted his release. This adds to a solid body of known evidence. Most fascinating is the author’s insight into the man himself. Cold killer he certainly was, utterly contemptuous of Aboriginal society, loathing what he called the ‘mongrel half-caste … born for the gallows’, yet reluctantly admiring of Aboriginal bush skills. As Nettelbeck and Foster show clearly, he was deeply enmeshed in the kinship bonds of his Aboriginal troopers and desperately anxious to be seen as an authority on the society he did his best to destroy. As for his mental balance, he could condemn Aboriginal women as lazy and slovenly, yet fantasise about their sexuality in the wildest terms. His contemporary – and the man who arrested him in 1890 – MC William South, thought him possibly insane. Nowhere does that impression become clearer than in the ravings of Willshire as ‘Oleara’ in his fantasy of the Aboriginal maiden ‘Chillberta’ in the grossly misnamed A Thrilling Tale of Real Life, or in his bizarre rhapsodies in Land of the Dawning about smiling Aboriginal beauties emerging from the rocks after Martini-Henry rifles had killed their men.

There is much more to read in this book on the intertwining Willshire with frontier society; and all who wish to understand that era should read it for its perceptive and wide-ranging analysis. We will probably never know more about Willshire – I suspect we have not yet unravelled all the threads of his mind and times and laid bare the forces that drove this terrible man. It might be well to balance the picture by recalling that not all pastoralists were like Willshire’s backers – witness Jim Parker who protected the survivors of the Barrow Creek massacres on his Bushy Park station – and most of the police were not like Willshire. Perhaps the assessment of boss drover, Matt Savage, a hard man and no lover of the law, is not far off the mark. ‘Some were mighty strange characters’, he said, ‘yet most of the troopers did try to be fair in their dealings with the Aborigines;’ as fair, that is, as white law would allow.

References
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This is a revised, expanded and improved version of a book originally published on the 30th anniversary of the referendum in 1997. Its original strengths remain: the contextualisation of the 1967 referendum within the long trajectory of campaigning for constitutional amendment dating back to 1910; detailed discussion of the decade-long struggle of Indigenous and pro-Indigenous activists to persuade the government to hold a referendum on both Section 51(xxxvi) and Section 127 of the Constitution; attentiveness to the disjuncture between the referendum’s legal consequences and its Mythological status as the moment of Aboriginal citizenship; and the well-chosen collection of original documents comprising the second half of the volume (now made more reader-friendly by providing page references to the documents from Attwood and Markus’s historical analysis in the first half). The new edition incorporates research findings from the last decade of scholarship on the 1967 referendum and on pro-Indigenous political activism more generally. It also, helpfully, adds an index.

The main difference between this and the earlier edition is signalled by the change of sub-title. The 1997 version, entitled The 1967 Referendum, or When Aborigines Didn’t Get the Vote, dwelt upon misunderstandings of the consequences of constitutional amendment, both by campaigners at the time and in subsequent memorialisation. Although that theme is still present, the new sub-title indicates its demotion in favour of extracting a positive meaning from the 1967 referendum. Attwood and Marcus now argue that the referendum should be appreciated as a significant step toward the recognition of distinctive rights and entitlements for Indigenous Australians; and that this agenda of differential rights and entitlements was the primary aspiration of the leaders of the campaign for constitutional amendment in the 1960s. As they acknowledge, their arguments on these points have been strongly influenced by the work of Sue Taffe, the leading historian of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) which dominated the campaign for constitutional amendment from 1958 until victory in 1967.

There can be no doubt that the FCAATSI leadership did entertain ideas of distinctive Indigenous entitlements, and Attwood and Marcus are right to draw attention to the fact. Yet they also acknowledge that FCAATSI seldom mentioned distinctive Indigenous entitlements in their public utterances during the referendum campaign, preferring to base their campaign rhetoric on appeals to equal rights and equal citizenship. Attwood and Markus do not adequately address the resultant tension between what voters were led to believe they were voting for in 1967 (equal citizenship for Aborigines) and what these historians would like their votes to be celebrated for (distinctive entitlements for Aborigines). Particularly in the final chapter, they vehemently denounce the ideal of precise equality of legal rights, singling out for special censure one of its leading exponents, former Prime Minister John Howard. Yet their own earlier chapters indicate that this was the ideal on which the campaigners for a ‘yes’ vote in 1967 based their appeals to the public. Rather than attempting to distill the significance of the referendum into an affirmation of distinctive Indigenous entitlements, it would be more in keeping with the evidence adduced by Attwood and Markus to acknowl-
edge that the referendum result is open-ended. The 90.77 per cent ‘yes’ vote was a clear public endorsement of the broad principle of Aboriginal inclusion in the Australian nation; but on how that inclusion should be achieved – whether by legal equality, by special temporary entitlements to remedy socio-economic disadvantage, or by recognition of enduring legal particularity – the referendum was necessarily inconclusive because these alternatives were seldom aired in public at the time.

Understanding why there was so little public debate over these alternatives, despite the fact that the leading ‘yes’ campaigners endorsed the special entitlements option, demands attentiveness to an issue treated far too lightly by Attwood and Markus. Unique among Australian referenda, there was no organised campaign for a ‘no’ vote. This gets just one fleeting mention in Attwood and Markus’s text, plus a few more in the documents in the second half of the book. Yet not only was the absence of a ‘no’ campaign causally connected with the unparalleled magnitude of the ‘yes’ vote, it also suggests that at the beginning of the 1967 referendum campaign there was already broad community support for the general principle of Aboriginal inclusion in the nation. Moreover, the absence of a ‘no’ campaign decisively shaped both the ‘yes’ campaign (facing no organised opposition, FCAATSI and its allies were seldom forced to explain their agenda in any depth or detail, so the campaign barely rose above the level of sloganeering) and its subsequent memorialisation (since no alternative narratives about the meaning of the referendum were generated at the time, it was inevitably the story of the ‘yes’ campaigners – that it signified equal rights and citizenship – that was remembered). Additionally, the lack of organised opposition offers the most compelling explanation for the fact that the leaders of the ‘yes’ campaign sought special benefits or entitlements for Aborigines but seldom publicly advertised this objective in the course of the campaign. They kept quiet because the absence of an oppositional campaign allowed them to stay within the safety-zone of slogans and platitudes.

Attwood and Markus are far from unique in overlooking the significance of the absence of an organised negative campaign. Indeed, all extant studies of the 1967 referendum, whether by historians, political scientists or former activists, either totally ignore this fact or skate over it with the barest of mentions. It is a significant weakness that this otherwise excellent study maintains that tradition. Hopefully, by the time Attwood and Markus compile their next edition for the 50th anniversary of the referendum, that omission will be remedied.

Reference

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Richard Broome and Corinne Manning have written an impressive biography of Alick Jackomos, a remarkable man whose contribution to cultural understanding in Victoria has been very important. Alick Jackomos, the son of immigrants from the Greek island of Castellorizo, was born in Carlton in 1924 and died in 1999. The biography chronicles his life based around his parents’ fish-and-chip shop in inner Melbourne, his war service, his years as a tent wrestler; his marriage into and immersion in the Aboriginal community; public service in Aboriginal affairs; and finally his extensive collecting of Aboriginal cultural history and genealogies.

Although described as ‘a man of all tribes’ and a ‘gubbah-iginal’, a person who is both gubbah (European) and Aboriginal in understanding, one of the tensions that pervaded his long association with the Victorian Aboriginal community was his non-Aboriginality and the emerging militancy in Aboriginal activism that sought to exclude non-Aboriginal people from Aboriginal affairs. And this was despite the fact that he married a Yorta Yorta woman in the face of significant opprobrium from his Greek family, and raised three children in the Aboriginal community. There is a growing body of literature that examines the tensions Indigenous people and people of mixed-descent experience in terms of acceptance and integration into non-Indigenous mainstream society – Henry Reynolds’ texts *With the White People* (1990) and *Nowhere People* (2005) are examples, but little has been published on the lack of acceptance and integration of non-Indigenous people within Indigenous society. But to dwell on this would be to overstate the frequency with which these frictions ruptured the otherwise harmonious and reciprocal relationships Jackomos and the Aboriginal community enjoyed.

Alick Jackomos was involved with the Victorian Aboriginal community from the early 1930s until his death from cancer in 1999. To use words that were used to describe Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson by western Victorian communities in 1841 who were surprised at his knowledge of Aboriginal society ‘he was like a black man for knowledge’. For any researcher of 20th-century Victorian Aboriginal history, genealogy, and community politics it is almost impossible to avoid reference to Alick Jackomos. His vast collection of some 4,000 photographs and extensive genealogies (some 525 family trees) compiled during a lifetime spent with Victoria’s Aboriginal community will remain an important resource for generations to come. Alick Jackomos’ legacy is a profound one and people with an interest in 20th-century Victorian community political history will welcome the publication of this biography.

**References**


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In the midst of the flurry of celebrations marking the centenary of Federation in 2001, the 100th anniversary of the passing of one of the first pieces of legislation in the new federal Parliament did not go unnoticed. The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* introduced the infamous dictation test that was designed to exclude migrants from entering the new nation at the whim of the administrators of the day. This legislation formally marked the beginning of the White Australia Policy in the new nation, reflecting the sentiments, particularly against Asian immigration, that had been fuelled by a range of interests including the trade union movement in all states. It took most of the 20th century to dismantle the policy yet the residue of its impact was still being experienced during the latter years of Prime Minister John Howard’s government with, for example, the introduction of a stringent Citizenship Test.

Australia’s Indigenous community experienced the new nation’s abhorrence of the possibility of a coloured nation when state governments introduced policies of segregation and assimilation which rested on hopes for the eventual absorption of Aboriginal people into a white nation. It was only in the 1970s, that some of the more blatant discriminatory policies targeting Australian’s Indigenous population were removed after the 1967 referendum and with the passing of the Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

It is in this context that the growing academic interest in connections between Asian and Indigenous Australians has emerged, initially very cautiously and in small voice, but more recently with confidence and from all quarters. Covering a range of content and quality – from the telling of stories or yarning around the hearth and gatherings of sympathetic supporters, to recollections shared at small conferences, to academic discourses, refereed journal articles and doctoral dissertations – a different social environment has spawned new works which challenge the old binary view of Australia as black and white. More Indigenous Australians now recognise connections across ethnic affiliations and a path to identity that embraces black, white and everything in between. Indigenous Australians who previously were strident in their quest for recognition of their black identity are now more relaxed in ‘claiming’ their ethnic inheritance from a variety of sources. Acknowledgement of the multiple identities and ancestries of Indigenous Australians fosters an inclusiveness that paradoxically speaks up against the assimilationist views of white Australia because it challenges the idea that there is one cultural entity into which one can be assimilated.

There are many ways of being Indigenous in Australia, just as there are many ways of being Asian in this country. When this recognition occurs there is a sense of liberation from white constraints, including attempts to force assimilation, probably similar to the sense their Indigenous and non-Indigenous (including Asian) ancestors gained when they chose to interact or intermarry. This subtle form of resistance that evokes a sense of ‘mutuality’ that goes beyond hierarchies, has precedents in South-
East Asia.\(^1\) It is no wonder, then, that Asians and Indigenous Australians were drawn together and took advantage of opportunities to interact, cohabit and settle together in spite of opposition from government authorities and the wider community.

Regina Ganter’s *Mixed Relations* was born of Ganter’s earlier work on the history of pearling in the Torres Straits.\(^2\) *Mixed Relations* presents a broad sweep of the history of Asian–Aboriginal connections in the north – across Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, Ganter’s ‘polyethnic north’, where Indigenous people’s long association with Asians predates European settlement of Australia. The collection and processing of trepang or sea cucumber for the Chinese market, fishing, pearling and later mining brought adventurers from the Indonesian archipelago, South-East Asia, East and South Asia to northern Australia.

Presented in larger format and in hardcover, this volume appears to have been designed as an accessible ‘coffee-table’ style publication. There are eight chapters which deal thematically with the milestones in Asian–Aboriginal associations in the North. Chapter 5, ‘Ethnic policy and practice in Darwin’, is attributed to Julia Martinez, herself of Asian and Aboriginal ancestry, but unfortunately I found it impossible to discover anything about this author in the book.

The stories that Ganter presents, gathered from people of Asian-Aboriginal background and well illustrated with photographs and maps, tell of hardship, survival and triumph in the face of legislative prohibitions. The situations in which these families lived were complex – social relationships were seriously hampered by interventionist government policies, there were crises of identity, betrayal, denial of identity and the need to hide Aboriginal identity and to ‘pass’ as Asians in order to gain the best outcome for their families. There were also innumerable individuals and families who never denied their Aboriginal identity and who therefore lived under the legislative strictures controlling Indigenous communities in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Ganter uses these anecdotes from families with a range of experiences to illustrate the history of Northern Australia from ‘coloured’ eyes.

Peta Stephenson’s *The Outsiders Within*, is about ‘the triangular relationship between Asians, Aborigines and White Australians’ and is a very different book from Ganter’s. Its great value is the subtlety of Stephenson’s argument and the intellectual rigour with which she presents her thesis. Stephenson moves beyond the narration of legislative oppression of Asian and Aboriginal people and anecdotes from their lives, to an analysis of what this means for Australia – what this tell us about Australia’s history and emergence as a nation. While it celebrates ‘the refusal of the law’s victims to be victimised ... the strategies, at once psychological, social and practical, employed to survive these curtailments of liberty’, it is firmly anchored in the contemporary context.\(^{(p. 5)}\)

The term ‘outsiders within’ reflects the complexities faced by ‘those who live the Indigenous-Asian experience’ – the degrees of ‘outsideness’ and ‘insideness’, the permeability of boundaries between outsiders and insiders, the symbolic identification in the imagination of a nation concerned about its whiteness. Stephenson’s narrative in

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nine chapters, hinges on what she identifies as four critical ‘moments’ in Australia’s history - the first, when the trepang trade was outlawed by the South Australian government in 1906; the second, when state legislation outlawed Indigenous-Asian alliances; the third, when the Second World War heightened Australia’s fear of an Asian invasion and the threat of Aboriginal collaboration with the Japanese; and the fourth, when Pauline Hanson’s maiden speech in the House of Representatives in 1996 raised the spectre of Asian and Aboriginal threat to her own (and white Australia’s) values. Each ‘moment’ is handled in two chapters - one drawing from traditional historical sources, and the other from Indigenous oral and contemporary artistic (cultural performance) sources.

I found the second half of the book compelling and satisfying, probably because of its contemporary relevance. Chapter 7 (Where are you from?), which deals with the national imaginary of the post-1980s which culminated in Pauline Hanson’s maiden speech, offers a new context for the discussion of Asian-Aboriginal identities, while Chapter 8 (Detoxifying Australia) analyses ways in which the damaged or toxic relations between Indigenous and Asian Australians and other (white) Australians are being rehabiliated through cultural production by Asian and Indigenous Australians in art, literature, musicals, comedy and plays. These and the final chapter which offers the metaphor of reunions as a way to the future, bring new and insightful analyses to contemporary Australia and possible directions for the future. Here the enduring presence of storytelling and humour, from both Asian and Indigenous perspectives, and their value in healing relationships shines.

Peta Stephenson’s thoughtful analysis of the complexities of Asian–Aboriginal relations and their place in shaping Australia today is a valuable contribution to Australian historiography. It brings new insights and a fresh perspective to the topic.

References

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In this important book, Roslyn Poignant draws on over a decade’s painstaking research in libraries and archives across three continents, to tell the story of two groups of Aboriginal people from neighbouring North Queensland communities who, in the late 19th-century, found themselves performing as living ethnological curiosities in circuses, popular exhibitions and museums across North America and Europe. What is
especially remarkable about this book is that Poignant did much of the research for it as a private scholar, enjoying limited institutional support and funding.

Poignant writes of embarking on writing the history of these Aboriginal performers after encountering an uncaptioned studio photograph of a man, woman and child in the archives of the Royal Anthropological Institute. They were posed in costumes with the man and boy holding weapons clearly suggesting the image was taken to be reproduced and sold as a souvenir of their show. Poignant was struck by how this photograph vividly captured their troubled expressions, disrupting the commercial and quasi-scientific intents of the image. It was to be, she writes, the ‘spark that ignited the slow fuse of research’ resulting in this study (p. 6). However, in 1993, the research unexpectedly gained new fire and ethical importance with Poignant’s involvement in the repatriation from a closed Ohio undertaking business of the embalmed body of Tambo, a man among the first group of people taken from North Queensland. By this time Poignant knew from Walter Palm Island, a senior lawman of the Manbarra people of Palm Island, that Tambo was his great grandfather and was known to have died after he and his companions had been pressed into performing on the North American circus circuit. In fact they had been a star attraction of PT Barnum’s Ethnological Congress of Strange Savage Tribes during 1883, before being toured around dime museums in northern US states, and then exhibited in various European cities.

In the first chapter, Poignant rescues these Aboriginal travellers from two centuries of stereotyping as nameless savages though carefully analysing surviving portraits and contemporary anthropological reportage, notably a detailed study made in 1884 by two leading figures of the Brussels Anthropological Society. Poignant confirms the language groups to which these people belonged and maps their probable kin-relations. She also shows how in obvious and in more subtle ways the travellers continued to observe customary law through their captivity.

Chapter 2 explores the background to these people becoming living ethnological curiosities far away from their ancestral country in coastal North Queensland. Poignant provides a concise yet informed account of the effects of pastoral ambition and the violent taking of land on the region’s Indigenous societies. The lives of Tambo and his fellow travellers were typical in that they lived between two worlds, keeping right ways alive yet forced to seek work on local cattle stations or pearling and bêche-de-mer boats. However, frontier conflict gave rise to cultural representations of the Aboriginal inhabitants of North Queensland that led to them being seen as a new commodity in what, by the 1880s, was a lucrative metropolitan market in exhibiting Indigenous peoples as primordial savages.

Chapter 3 focuses on Tambo who, with those were to be his fellow performers, was taken from North Queensland by RA Cunningham, one of numerous itinerant showmen and theatrical agents who eked out a living touring American circus and variety performers round Australia. Cunningham we learn cut a deal with PT Barnum to tour these Aboriginal people as a tribe of Australian Cannibals – ‘beyond conception most curious to look upon’ – in his travelling Ethnological Congress. On the question of why they agreed to go with Cunningham, Poignant argues that all we can say about the circumstances of their decision must be speculative; but she presents a strong case for
seeing them as having sought to escape the hardships and dangers of fringe camp life on the outskirts of Townsville, Ingham or other coastal towns.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 tell of the experiences of these Aboriginal travellers in North America and Europe. In the process, Poignant has much to say about Barnum’s exploitation of public curiosity in so-called freaks of nature, wild men and the savage races of mankind that illuminates important connections between the exhibition of these ‘living curiosities’ and the contemporaneous evolution of anthropological science. She alerts us to how permeable the boundaries between entertainment and science remained even some 20 or so years after the institutionalisation of the discipline within the western academy.

Chapter 7 follows on, offering the most interesting, moving and disturbing chapter of this book. Poignant investigates the circumstances in which four of the travellers died – in Paris and in the German cities of Chemnitz, Darmstadt and Sonnborn – from what appears to have been a virulent strain of tuberculosis. In doing so, she draws attention to signs that one death provoked questioning of Cunningham’s morality in continuing their captivity. This valuably complicates our understanding of the reception of ethnological spectacles, suggesting that we would do well to see that they could, at times, elicit more ambivalent responses than scholarship on the subject to date has generally assumed. The chapter also traces the fate of the remains of these people, providing richly contextualised insights into how and why European anatomical communities eagerly sought to acquire Aboriginal Australian skeletal and soft tissue during the 1880s.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 continue the story of the three surviving travellers, and their probable deaths far away from their ancestral country, before turning to the story of a second group of Aboriginal men and women who left Townsville with Cunningham in 1892. The experiences of this group, exhibited as King Bill and his company, proved much harder to reconstruct, though again Poignant has done much to piece together their experiences, to recover their identities and work out their possible familial relationships. We also learn how this second band of travellers, exploited by Cunningham through North American and Europe, sought to maintain their dignity and culture. At least two of them were to return to Townsville after being repatriated from London by Queensland’s Agent General in 1898. The book closes, appropriately, with a reflective chapter on the homecoming of Tambo’s embalmed body and the return of his spirit to Manbarra country.

This is a magnificent book that blends meticulous archival research with rich ethnographic insights to tell an unknown story in our colonial past for a wide readership. It has much to say that is new and important for historians of Aboriginal-settler relations and 19th-century colonial cultures. The University of New South Wales Press is also to be congratulated on matching Poignant’s scholarship with numerous and necessary images of high quality.

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The declared aim of this book is to ‘explore the impact of Indigenous people upon the European discovery of Australian plants, most particularly during the 19th century’. This aim has been interpreted in a very wide sense. The book intermingles a history of Australian exploration, settlement and plant collection with accounts of Aborigines who acted as guides to the country and its plant resources. Many Europeans gave little or no acknowledgement of their debt to the knowledge of Indigenous people, but the author has been at pains to seek out evidence for the possible transmission of information from Aborigines to Europeans. The book is attractively illustrated with historical and contemporary pictures, and is fully referenced, so it could fall between the categories of ‘coffee table’ and ‘text’. At the end of the volume are endnotes, references, a common names index, a botanical names index and a general index.

The first two chapters deal generally with relationships between Indigenous people and early explorers and settlers, which often led to the adoption of bush foods and medicines when other supplies ran out. The necessity to cure or prevent scurvy meant that fresh greens were sought by the Europeans. John White, the first fleet surgeon, was warned in 1788 by Aborigines not to eat a fungus, but was not dissuaded from the green ‘wood-sorrel’. Tasmanian settlers adopted the Aboriginal practice of tapping the sap of the Cider Gum (*Eucalyptus gunnii*) which after natural fermentation made an ‘intoxicating drink’. (The description of the sap by the author as ‘resin’ is incorrect.) Aromatic plants, particularly *Eucalyptus* and related species, were readily adopted from the Aborigines as medicines. In this chapter the author might well have given credit to the work of James Dawson and his daughter Isabella who, as settlers in Western Victoria, collected and published much plant and language information obtained from local tribes, but failed to have specimens botanically identified.

The chapter ‘Making plant names’ is very interesting. It discusses how the English-speaking invaders coined common names for an unfamiliar flora, and occasionally took Aboriginal names from various regional languages and anglicised them as common names. This builds on the well-known book by Dixon and others, *Australian Aboriginal Words in English* (1990). *Santalum acuminatum* was called Native Peach because of its red colour and hard wrinkled stone, but it is usually called Quandong, probably a version of *guwandhaang*, from the Wiradjuri language of central New South Wales. The use of Aboriginal names can result in confusion – the Queensland name *oon-doroo* has been given by mistake to *Solanum simile*, a southern Australian species which does not occur in Queensland; in that state *oon-doroo* was another *Solanum* species, *S. esuriale*. The name originally given to *S. simile* in South Australia was *quena*.

A single plant species can have many common names, some of quite local coinage, so common names are very unreliable identifiers. One person’s ‘Pattersons Curse’ is another person’s ‘Salvation Jane’ (*Echium plantagineum*). It is perhaps surprising that the author has chosen throughout the text to identify a species by a single common name; this forces the reader to keep consulting the index at the back of the book to find out the true species name. For historians this might not be a problem, but for gardeners and botanists it is annoying.
The author then goes on to devote single chapters to some of the well-known plant collectors and explorers and how they were helped by Aboriginal people. The chapter headed ‘George Caley in New South Wales’ starts with a full history of Australian plant collecting from the 18th century onwards, but it was not until Caley’s arrival in 1800 that we find credit given to a named Aboriginal guide – Moowattin. Caley found him particularly useful in climbing trees to get specimens, and for collecting local language names. Alan Cunningham arrived as a botanist in 1816, and on his many travels employed Aboriginal guides, but seems to have been content to make his own observations rather than seeking out Aboriginal knowledge. Resident plant collectors such as James Drummond and Georgiana Molloy, living in close contact with their local tribes in Western Australia, received much valuable information about the surrounding plants.

A whole chapter is devoted to Leichhardt’s exploration and contribution to plant knowledge, but strangely, Major Mitchell’s extensive explorations are ignored. His Aboriginal guides, his illustrations (particularly of Turandurey and her child), his observations of Aboriginal people and his care to collect and document plants are surely worthy of attention in a book such as this.

Chapter 8 is devoted to Ferdinand von Mueller. While undoubtedly a very important plant collector, he had little interaction with Aboriginal people, but identified and documented specimens of plants used for various purposes by Aborigines which were sent to him by many collectors. He also prepared a list of plants which could have been used by Tasmanian Aborigines, but without any direct contact.

The chapter on inland explorers is largely concerned with the Burke and Wills expedition, which resulted in the explorers’ deaths while subsisting on the Nardoo fern, *Marsilea* species. The author provides an excellent discussion of the use of the Nardoo spore cases as a food. It is likely that Burke and Wills, lacking the skills of Aboriginal women in preparing Nardoo, succumbed to the thiaminase in the spore cases, which deprives the body of vitamin B1. A final chapter, headed ‘The study of Aboriginal plant use’ brings together brief accounts of some early investigators of the phytochemistry of Australian plants, and some 19th-century compilers of information such as Brough Smyth, Edward Curr, Walter Roth and Joseph Maiden whose books are invaluable references today.

A word about the indexes: although the reference list is very comprehensive, it seems to contain entries to which there are no references in the text. Donald Thomson has three entries in references, but no entry in the general index, and similarly for Major Thomas Mitchell. The copious endnotes may refer to these, but it would be useful to be able to find where the authors are mentioned.

The author has given us a book somewhat different from its title and aim. As well as showing the impact of Indigenous people upon the European discovery of Australian plants, it attempts to cover a history of European encounters with the Australian flora. It is difficult to show that all of these involved the passing-on of Aboriginal knowledge. Nevertheless for the general reader this history is a useful picture of Euro-
pean attitudes to both the unfamiliar flora and the Indigenous inhabitants, and for the researcher the extensive endnotes provide a mine of information.

References


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In 1925 ethnologist Henry Basedow predicted that much Indigenous heritage – ‘habits, laws, beliefs and legends’ – was doomed to extinction while Aboriginal ‘bones, stone artefacts and wooden implements would remain in our museums for ever’. This view of a fragmented Indigenous cultural heritage remains a popular one. In this book, Michael Davis describes the textual representations of this heritage from the latter part of the 19th century.

The reviewer, involved in heritage conservation since Justice Hope’s Committee of Enquiry into the National Estate in 1973, found this book to be a valuable compendium of extracts from all the major collectors, offering analysis of ideas about the Indigenous material culture that they were collecting. Its chronological arrangement allows the reader to see the development of ideas, theories and competing interpretations – the theorists versus those living with Indigenous groups. It traces the role of private collectors – amateur field naturalists with a growing fascination with Indigenous materials – through to the university-trained ethnographers, anthropologists and last on the scene, archaeologists, often working as public collectors for museums. It fleshes out the personalities and tantalising debates presented a decade earlier by Tom Griffiths in Hunters and Collectors (1996) about the excursions of Victoria-based collectors to central Australia.

Davis uses both private and public sources: diaries, journals and personal correspondence and official correspondence and reports, legal materials and other published records. This range enables Davis to delve into contested interpretations of the material, such as the debates between the Melbourne private collector, Stan Mitchell, and Fred McCarthy of the Sydney Museum.

Some themes are dominant throughout the writings – the desire to find ‘authentic’ heritage in ‘pristine’ traditional societies untouched by European influence and the influence of ideas about primitivism, hence the focus on the Northern Territory where the ‘real’ Aboriginal Australian was to be located. The notion of an ‘authentic Aboriginality’ led to concerns about recording the ‘dying race’ and, from the 1920s, to calls for protection of rapidly disappearing Aboriginal artefacts as part of ‘national heritage’. This was obviously needed given the example of RM Wishart and Fred Smith in 1932 at
Willaura in western Victoria recording ‘our best find ever’ when they ‘picked up 1700 stone implements in one day’ (p. 230).

The shift in European perception of Indigenous objects as ethnographic items to works of art is also traced from Baldwin Spencer’s purchase in 1912 of Oenpelli bark paintings, through to the 1955 Northern Territory legislation to protect native objects and more recently, legislation to protect Indigenous designs through copyright. The slow emergence of the European realisation that artefacts needed to be considered and valued in the context of their place of origin and meaning to their designers/creators is also a powerful theme in the selected writings.

Throughout European writing about Indigenous societies, terms such as ‘relics’, ‘antiquities’, ‘curiosities’ and ‘monuments’ were used, while today’s language of policy refers to ‘heritage’, ‘culture’, ‘art’ and ‘artefacts’. The earlier terms Davis believes masked or denied Indigenous heritage as a living force. Today’s legislation for national heritage requires iconic places of outstanding significance to all Australians. Yet again this is an appropriation of locale and its significance from the Dreaming for those of that place, those with obligations to care for that country.

The book is arranged in three parts. The period of ‘wonders and curiosities’ covers compliers such as JC Cox, F Carrington, PW Bassett-Smith, R Brough Smyth; collectors such as the Horn Expedition’s looting of a tjurunga storehouse at Haast Bluff; recognition of rock art from George Grey (1841) in the Kimberley wandjinas, to WD Campbell’s surveys of Port Jackson rock carvings (1899) and Walter Roth’s description of Cooktown mural paintings (1898); and classification of stone tools by DL Stirling and AS Kenyon (1900). This section of the book includes the dominance of Baldwin Spencer’s emphasis on classification in ethnographic recording and collections with Frank Gillen of the native tribes of central Australia remained for over two decades, along with their interest in recording sacred ceremonies compared with the ‘ordinary corroborees’. It also outlines the growth in knowledge through fieldwork, research and publication is described and the role of anthropologists, such as AP Elkin and EWP Chinnery, in calling for a shift in policy for protection of Aboriginal lifestyles.

Part Two addresses the period from the 1930s to the late 1960s and illustrates the continuing obsession with collecting, classifying and displaying authentic artefacts in the search for meaning of lost relics of a ‘dying race’. Fascination with Aboriginal art continued, with living artists such as Albert Namatjira being favoured at the same time that Charles Mountford was advocating training in stone-age art. Calls for preservation continued driven in part by new discoveries such as those arising from the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land which was coordinated by Montford. Collections and research became institutionalised and legislation for preservation was passed in the Northern Territory in 1960 due to concerns about vandalism at Ayers Rock, and in South Australia in 1965, highlighting protection of stone arrangements on Observatory Hill in the Emu Reserve.

The final part (only 30 pages in length) examines the history of attempts to recognise the intangible elements of Indigenous heritage through surveys of sacred sites (especially by the Berndts) and the greater role of the Commonwealth after the 1967 referendum. The arts-related domain of government led attempts to protect ‘Aboriginal folklore’ from 1973 but legislation for this never eventuated. Instead the suite of herit-
age-protection legislation from the mid 1970s is described and the most recent (2003) is noted. The role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, intellectual property rights, Mabo and native title, competing views over ownership of the past and Indigenous heritage are all briefly canvassed.

The latest heritage efforts concentrate more on processes of consultation and resolution of competing claims rather than on considerations of meaning of heritage significance. Despite the now accepted link between place as a source of living heritage and art, artefacts, customs, language and the indivisibility of this heritage for Indigenous people, legislation is still fragmented with place-based protection separate from protection of movable cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage.

The obsession with classification remains. The Australian government’s National Heritage List must be of places of ‘outstanding heritage value to the nation’ to distinguish between places of state or local significance. Consequently after more than four years of operation, there are only 11 places listed primarily for their Aboriginal significance. Fortunately this includes the great extent of Burrup Peninsula rock engravings that were previously unprotected. In addition, the List contains all of Australia’s World Heritage properties including the four with Indigenous values of world significance. It would be interesting to see what places readers think should be protected by the highest level of legislation given the long history of calls for protection outlined in Davis’ book.

As a policy specialist with the Parliament’s information and research service, Davis is familiar with the intertwined history of collectors’ trips, publications, legislation and so on. However, the reader would be well served by the provision of a timeline of key dates, as the periods of activity do not neatly fall into exact chronologies.

This book is a fine introduction to the raising of European consciousness of Indigenous heritage from the later 19th century. A more detailed examination of the disputes, delays and the major players in Indigenous heritage protection over the last decade is now required.

Reference

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1. The 11 National Heritage List places at 10 June 2008 are: Brewarrina Fish Traps; Cyprus Helene Club – Australian Hall Day of Mourning; Kurnell Peninsula Headland; Myall Creek massacre site; Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape – Mt Eccles Lake Condah; Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape – Tyrendarra area; Mt William Stone Hatchet Quarry; Dampier Archipelago (including Burrup Peninsula); Recherche Bay (north-east peninsula) Area; Hermannsburg Historic Precinct; Wave Hill Walk Off Route, see <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/index.html>
When I was growing up in Victoria and my parents took us for drives in the country, we would often stop for morning tea beside the road where there was some welcome shade – and where there was also, frequently, a stone cairn. I would wander over and look at the inscription. They were simple pillars of rough stones, and over one hundred of them were built in the first decades of the 20th century to honour and mark the paths of European explorers across Victoria. Where their plotted routes of exploration crossed with modern roads or features, these piles of stones were built and cemented into place, thus inscribing lines of European discovery and catching the landscape in a net of settler history. The unveiling of the explorers’ cairns were occasions for speeches about country life, immigration and defence. Sometimes local Aboriginal identities were incorporated into the ceremony, generally those identified as ‘the last of the tribe’. The cairns therefore acquired a triumphal air in their linear march across the land they claimed.

One of the leaders of this ‘memorial movement’, as it was called, was Alfred Kenyon, an engineer, historian and collector who is mentioned by John Mulvaney in his chapter in this book. Kenyon was one of those collecting enthusiasts who, in the first half of the 20th century, avidly gathered and removed Aboriginal stone tools from the field. Truck loads of them were piled up in the National Museum of Victoria, and together they formed another kind of cairn. While monuments were being erected to European explorers across the landscape, collectors were removing the field evidence of Aboriginal occupation and piling up tens of thousands of stone tools into a sort of central memorial cairn to ‘the stone age’. While one set of cairns was inventing places for the European imagination, the other cairn was leaching the landscape of Aboriginal meaning and disassembling Indigenous place.1

For me, this story became a powerful example of how a collection can be an artefact in its own right, as Leonn Satterthwait argues in the opening essay in this volume. That is to say, apart from the meanings of their individual constituents, collections as a whole have a weird and distorting – but real – integrity. In the case of Alfred Kenyon and his fellow stone tool collectors, it’s possible that the stone tools had more meaning en masse than they did individually, that it was the sheer volume of them and the fact of their aggregation and displacement that was most important to the people who gathered them.

This important book analyses the collecting of Indigenous artefacts and tries to see collections whole, as artefacts in their own right. How were they amassed and why? In what ways are collections of material culture expressions of the personality of the collector and in what ways do they represent or misrepresent the people who made the objects? When it comes to Indigenous material objects, the white collector was often better documented than the artefact itself or the culture it was expected to embody. In the study of museum collections, one has to try hard to look beyond the collector. But in order to see around or beyond or through the collector, you need first to understand

him or her, to factor them in before you factor them out. And, of course, the collectors are indeed a fascinating study in their own right.

By analysing diaries, correspondence, captions and the collections of objects themselves, this book tries to take us into the minds of the collectors. What motivated them? What was their passion, their quest, their obsession? For great collectors do live and work on the edge of madness. There are glimpses of madness in here, examples of ‘collecting mania’. ‘Get all the native things you [can] and as many as possible’, John Tunney was told by the director of his museum. I am ‘annexing all I can lay hands on’, wrote James Field to Baldwin Spencer in 1903. And there are examples of curatorial nightmares too, such as the accidental and irrevocable separation of objects from their labels, a dismaying chasm sometimes opened up by circumstance. David Kaus records that, when Norman Tindale listed Herbert Basedow’s collection, he found the artefacts in one pile and Basedow’s labels in another. How mute the orphan object can be! And how demanding and educational is the writing of a caption. John Mulvaney has a quote from Baldwin Spencer that every museum scholar will appreciate. Writing in 1900, Spencer confessed: ‘there is nothing like trying to arrange a big collection for revealing to you your colossal ignorance: when you sit down to write a descriptive label then you begin to realize how defective your knowledge is’.

These essays take us into museum basements and storage rooms, and out into the field; they sit us down in the dust so that we can witness the barter and exchange over objects, the trade in ideas, words, stories and things that led to Indigenous artefacts crossing the frontier, and eventually making their way into museums for research and display. What was lost and what was gained in that process? Museums are the most privileged window on this cross-cultural transition, in both the past and the present. In some ways museums encapsulate the frontier still, for they are the chief sites of barter and exchange over the material culture of others and ourselves. Of course they are therefore institutions with histories of exploitation and appropriation and violation. Many collectors stole or bullied artefacts from Aborigines. But museums also allow us to move towards a positive sense of the frontier as a shared space — and on that frontier, collectors, both private and institutional, played a fundamental and sometimes creative role. The moral complexities of frontier life emerge clearly in these encounters. Many Indigenous objects and crafts were generated by the economics of cultural exchange, and Aborigines could gain some fragile power through the patronage of collectors. Collecting or barter, as Elizabeth Willis shows in her chapter, could, for some white collectors, be a sympathetic way of drawing Aboriginal people into a new economy. In the words of Philip Jones, another of the contributors to this book, the frontier was ‘less a line that separates than a zone that unifies, a zone capable of generating new and potent forms of culture’.2

So, in studying the collector and in analysing the collection as an artefact, in opening up the museum basement to our scrutiny, this book makes a significant contribution to Australian history and to cross-cultural studies. And it does so at a time when museums have undergone a fascinating revolution in ethics and sensibility. As the editors note in their introduction, many major Australian museum displays of Ab-

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Original material culture remained unchanged throughout much of the 20th century, still caught in the thrall of nineteenth-century typologies. This began to change swiftly in the 1980s. Early collectors never imagined that Indigenous people would actually see their own objects in state and national museums. Now they not only see them; they are very often the curators of them. In some cases they have reclaimed them. The essays in this volume chart that intriguing and exciting transformation of museums from imperial trophy-houses to Indigenous keeping places.

And here’s the paradox explored by this book. Collectors, although they sometimes promulgated negative images of primitive Indigenous cultures, were also often the leading edges of the white conscience. There is a passionate defence of Baldwin Spencer by John Mulvaney in this book, where he reminds us that we need to see Spencer’s collecting in the context of his time, and that he was unusually sympathetic and enlightened for his generation. Kate Kahn, in another chapter, shows us how WE Roth, although he used terms and concepts unacceptable now, was nevertheless ‘a man ahead of his time’. Lindy Allen, in her fascinating study of Donald Thomson, shows us a collector trying to compile as complete a picture of Aboriginal lives as possible, systematically and devotedly bartering material and intellectual treasures with ‘tobacco, fish hooks, wire and flour’. The book also reveals the way that collections indeed have lives of their own and sometimes undermine the explicit purposes of the collectors – and so, objects gathered as relics of a doomed race are used today by contemporary Indigenous people to renew a living culture. And so Alfred Kenyon, a man who scraped the landscape clean of Aboriginal material culture and celebrated European triumph in its place, would be stunned by the uses Aboriginal people have since made of items in his collection.

In some cases, the collector’s collection has had to be reconstituted, such as Ian Coates achieves for Harry Hillier whose ethnographic collections are held in at least six museums in Australia, England, Scotland and the United States. Or as Louise Hamby does for Lloyd Warner, whom she dubs ‘the reluctant collector’ but whose gathered objects from Arnhem Land are nevertheless spread around the globe across nine different institutions. So, it is possible for the following sequence to arise: a collection is made, then it is physically dispersed, then it is intellectually reconstituted, and then, some of it might be actually repatriated as Aboriginal people rediscover it. Now, that’s the kind of exciting and convoluted journey – into the field, back into the museum, across the world and back into the field again – that an interest in collections can take you on.

This book about collectors and collections is itself, of course, a collection – and therefore an artefact in its own right. It has an excellent introduction by the three editors, Nicolas Peterson, Lindy Allen and Louise Hamby and its authors come from every Australian mainland state and territory, and one from the United States. The great ethnographic collectors are mentioned or studied in depth here, and some of the lesser known too – Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen, WE Roth, the Strehlows, Norman Tindale, Donald Thomson, Ursula McConnel, Charles Mountford, Lindsay Winterbotham, Frederick McCarthy, Ronald and Catherine Berndt, John Helder Wedge, Charles Joseph La Trobe, John Hunter Kerr, Otto Siebert, Henry ‘Harry’ Hillier, John Tunney, Herbert Basedow, Edmund Milne, Lloyd Warner, Helen Wurm, Edward Ruhe and John Kluge.
In an address given at the National Library of Australia in 1974 in honour of the collector Rex Nan Kivell, Bernard Smith urged Australian historians to ‘seek a more balanced, a more archaeological, a more humanist view of our history’. And one way of doing that, he felt, was to take more interest in our nation’s great collectors, those people whose material legacy would wield an influence upon Australian historical scholarship ‘comparable [in Smith’s words] to that exercised by the great collections of the Renaissance’. Bernard Smith celebrated the boundless and often eccentric curiosity of such collectors, and their faith in the materiality of culture. And so does this book. It turns our attention to people who were often marginalised by professional disciplines, yet who were keenly attuned to the ‘archaeological side of our history’; they knew and celebrated ‘the sensuous enjoyment of material things’; they were determined to engage in difficult but rewarding cross-cultural exchange.

References

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Archaeology to Delight and Instruct: Active Learning in the University Environment edited by Heather Burke and Claire Smith, 288 pp, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, California, 2007, $29.95.

Heather Burke and Claire Smith, who are archaeologists based at the University of Adelaide, have edited a timely addition to the teaching of theoretical issues in archaeology in the undergraduate classroom. The main aim of this volume is to lobby for a greater use of active learning strategies (as opposed to passive lecturing) in the communication of theory in archaeological teaching. To this end they have developed a number of themes around a range of instructional strategies illustrated by their contributors.

The instructional strategies employed by the editors include role-playing, simulations, games, hands-on learning, creativity and critical reflection. Chapters particularly indicative of each strategy are reviewed in order to give the prospective reader a feel for the style, content and effectiveness of such approaches to archaeological learning. In Morag Kersel’s example, debate is used to explore the complexities and nuances of one of the more politically charged archaeological issues today: repatriation. Kersel uses the case of the Elgin/Parthenon (depending on your perspective) marbles housed in the British Museum. Using a polarised and student-managed debate is an excellent technique that allows a thorough exploration of the issues involved. While Kersel provides

advice on how to deal with a waning debate, I have found, using a similar approach, that assigning roles and a formal sequence reduces the need for the lecturer’s intervention, thus allowing the students more ‘freedom’ to pursue their own arguments. I have found it extremely effective to have initial ‘staters’ set the respective cases followed by ‘provers’ that develop the main arguments for each side. Intervention from the opposing sides is not permitted. After the arguments have been explored by each side the ‘attackers’ have an opportunity to tackle the main arguments and proofs of the opposing sides. The use of debate, as Kersel suggests, allows for a much closer and critical engagement with the topic at hand. When I have used this teaching strategy to explore repatriation of Australian Aboriginal human remains and associated mortuary material culture, I have found the students often empathise with their assigned positions, whether they agree with them or not.

In terms of simulations, one of the most popular archaeological teaching tools is the simulated excavation. Bradley Bowman and Glenna Dean’s chapter relays their experiences with such an approach. Bowman and Dean run a program that aims to couple the act of excavation to analysis, interpretation and ethics. They argue that it is too easy to teach excavation techniques through simulated digs for, unwittingly, absolutely wrong outcomes. The authors of this chapter describe in some detail the structure of their program and the goals of each stage. The first things their students learn before they even begin to think about excavation is an appreciation of the way in which artefacts tell of time and change through an archaeological deposit. Students are taught the value of preservation of archaeological sites and the value of artefacts as something that transcends current market prices. Only then are they permitted to become involved in the excavation of a simulated site; a site seeded with the types of artefacts with which the students have already become familiar. During the excavation phase the usual set of skills and techniques are taught with an emphasis on thorough recording of artefacts and other materials and subsequent analysis back in the lab. The way in which the program is structured, especially the initial familiarity with the culture period in question, allows for more informed student inferences when they come to interpret the site. Without incorporating theory within our simulated excavations we could be simply training the next generation of (more sophisticated) looters.

Gail Higginbottom (p. 78) makes the point that ‘[u]niversity students choose to learn, they want to know … [and] [a]dding an element of fun is one of these ways’. Gail introduces the age-old strategic card game as a fun technique which pulls together the disparate themes of archaeological theory as well as facilitating better student retention. Higginbottom (p. 70) draws on research that suggests student preferences for ‘stimulating games that [require] the use of logic, memory, visualization, and problem-solving’. As with the use of student-managed debates, the employment of a card game, where regular suits are substituted for archaeological theories, personalities, famous quotes and so forth, encourages the students to engage with the relevant literature in order to give themselves an edge during the game. There is certainly a great deal of scope in having the students design the theme and art work of the cards themselves, thus deepening their involvement, and no doubt improving their learning experience. While I have never used card games in my own teaching, I can see great value in the technique.

Within the theme of ‘hands on teaching’ Martin Wobst takes the somewhat esoteric approach of using the toilet as the focus of a field outing. Wobst’s explorations of
the humble toilet include ‘our image of person, status, power, gender, and privacy’ (p. 207). While I was somewhat skeptical at first, I quickly became a convert and only regret the fact that it would be difficult to incorporate such an outing in my own courses. However, one of Wobst’s other uses of the material culture of toilets may prove to be more applicable, in my case at least. I, like most that have tried to instil the feeling of vast tracts of time in my students when dealing with the geological and historical timescale, have usually resorted to the quite ineflectual clock analogy: *Homo sapiens* arrived in the final eight seconds I seem to recall. Wobst has used a technique of using standard issue toilet rolls, and their individual sheets, as measure of time. Typically it takes about nine rolls of toilet paper to encompass the entire history of the earth with one sheet being the equivalent of 1,000,000 years. This is a fun and interesting chapter with a very important message regarding the role of material culture studies. Whatever the final outcome of a field excursion to the local public toilet, assuredly it will be an experience that will remain with the student for some considerable time. And even more assuredly leave them with a greater appreciation of how material culture can transform humans, rather than the other way round.

Caryn Berg addresses the theme of creativity by presenting an exercise that uses creative writing as an archaeological learning tool. Berg discusses an approach where students develop a creative narrative, with a focus on a fictional individual, based upon a more traditional review of archaeological data from the academic literature. Berg argues this exercise facilitates a greater appreciation of humanity in both the past and present and also allows students to explore alternative interpretations of archaeological data sets. Berg has modified the exercise over time in response to student feedback but the consensus seems to be that the exercise is pedagogically effective and also, importantly, fun. Archaeology and creativity have certainly had an interesting relationship over the years with the archaeological exploits of now famous fictional characters such as Lara Croft, Indiana Jones and Ben Gates no doubt informing much of the public’s understanding of archaeological endeavour. While some may suggest there is enough creative narrative in some forms of academic archaeological writing, it would, nonetheless, seem a useful educational approach.

Patricia Ruberstone writes to the theme of critical reflection in her chapter reviewing innovative ways to teach in the archaeology of death and mortuary practices. Actively teaching and researching in this area myself I was somewhat surprised by the apparent ambivalence of North American archaeologists to teaching on this topic. Ruberstone spends some time defending the relevance of having such courses in the undergraduate curricula and then proceeds to discuss the use of the scrapbook as a remarkably effective tool for engendering student critical thinking. The scrapbooks that her students are required to construct are composed of a series of articles sourced broadly (magazines, newspapers, academic papers and so on) and intended to inform a series of themes associated with death. The students are then required to write short interpretative essays on these themes, informed by their collected clippings. Ruberstone argues that the scrapbook approach facilitates a much closer and, importantly, critical engagement by students with the chief themes explored in the course and also brings the various aspects of the archaeological study of death into the present, thus creating a greater sense of relevance to the students.
While I am not certain that traditional lectures will disappear anytime soon as a teaching method, technological changes that include the facility to audio-visually record lectures and place them in university intranet sites is certainly affecting traditional lecture attendance in many tertiary institutions. However, such technological advances do not provide any pedagogical advantages other than allowing student flexibility in catching up with missed lectures. The overriding theme of this volume is that more innovative, engaged and fun teaching activities and scenarios are imperative if improvements are to be made in the ways in which we teach and students learn. This book really is a must for anyone involved in teaching archaeology, whether they are at the beginning or well into their careers.

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This book is based on long and extensive experience of archaeological work in the United States. As a result it is well worth reading and pondering though of moderate practical use in the field for somebody working in Australia. Its value here would seem to be mainly as a teaching tool, a guide to important and useful strategies, containing numerous reminders of aspects and avenues often forgotten or just not considered.

The early chapters deal with definitions and the history of archaeological surveys in North America and are interesting in terms of comparisons with Australia. Chapters 3 to 8 deal with equipment and survey basics, for example maps, coordinate systems and GPS (Global Positioning System). For those working here, there are guides more relevant to Australian conditions. If, however, you are planning to work outside Australia, it could be very useful to consider how things may be done elsewhere and what questions to ask about such matters before you start.

Chapters 9 to 13, ‘Fieldwork’ and Chapter 14, ‘Professionalism’ are of general interest and to my mind important to read, certainly if you are fairly new to the field and hoping or planning to do fieldwork. Experienced archaeologists may also find useful reminders of matters to consider and examples to make them smile or groan over shared problems. For those who teach archaeology this would be useful material to provide the students for reading and discussion.

Some major points are relevant for a number of reasons. Great stress is laid on the need for very thorough background research: what has been done in the area before, what has been written up – or not, and why, where information might be found in public or private records, what types of data was each researcher/team setting out to look for and what might they have ignored for lack of interest or knowledge. What was the expertise of the researcher or team? How were data recorded? What was actually noted and seen to be of interest? If nothing was found, was it because only a limited set of data was looked for? Or because the expertise to note other types of data was lacking?
This set of questions brings out the need for practitioners to have access to complete archaeological reports, not just digitised summaries or site lists, as has sometimes been suggested by heritage authorities holding the reports. We need to know, in detail, what was thought and what was done. The book may be useful when such matters have to be argued with authorities – or when consultants need to argue for time to do such background research. It also emphasises our duty to be explicit about the what, why and how when writing reports.

The authors provide numerous sources of information going beyond reports held by state authorities and so on. Though these lists relate to the United States, they are useful in triggering our imaginations to find and access similar less official sources here. This is a book worth reading but not to be lugged about in a backpack.

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*Protecting Çatalhöyük, Memoir of an Archaeological Site Guard* by Sadrettin Dural, with contributions by Ian Hodder, translated by Duygu Camuruoglu Cleere, 160 pp, Berg Publishers, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, California, £40.00.

This is Sadrettin Dural’s story as a site guard at Çatalhöyük, the famed Turkish Neolithic archaeological site, also well known for a recent focus from the international Mother Goddess community. From the nearby village of Küçükköy, Sadrettin starts life as a farmer, but also works as a taxi driver, before financial difficulties result in his taking on his role as a guard and guide at Çatalhöyük. This is in 1993 when Ian Hodder begins new archaeological excavations. Before that the site had been fenced off from the local community, its trenches lying open since James Mellaart’s well-known excavations.

Sadrettin’s understanding of the past of his region is probably fairly typical of the attitudes of rural Turks of his generation. In his own words, he outlines his growing relationship with the site, its discoveries and his growing understanding of the scientific approach of the archaeological team. He shows a keen curiosity and willingness to learn about the archaeologists’ work and how people lived at the site 9,000 years ago. His questions demonstrate a focus on the individual life in that past, why and how people behaved the way they did – so different to today: why was the disabled individual buried in the ‘rubbish tip’, how did individual families actually live and relate to each other in the closely packed dwellings of that time? His speculations contrast with archaeological research posed of the site.

Dural’s experiences at the site are interwoven with his life story, and in telling this he uses traditional parables and village stories to draw explanations and how to respond – lessons in life. A mistaken trust in business colleagues results in his ending up in prison, a shameful experience partly mitigated by a visit from the Çatalhöyük

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archaeological team, a recognition outside his cultural experience and one that stresses the different world views.

Ian Hodder is known for his commitment to engage with community views, especially in his work at Çatalhöyük; his interview with Dural included in the book, demonstrates this. Hodder locates this approach in current post-processual reflexive archaeology. He has argued strongly for an acceptance of community interpretations of Çatalhöyük – the multivocality currently prevalent in interpretations of archaeology.\(^2\) He has, however, shown an unwillingness to privilege the ‘local community’ over other communities, such as the Goddess interest in this site,\(^3\) that perhaps sits uncomfortably in an Australian context.

The book is short and easy to read. Even so, I found the overly simple English at times disconcerting, even patronising, but can only assume that this reflects the style of the writer, rather than imposed by the translator, Duygu Camuruoğlu Cleere. Whilst an account of one individual’s relationship with a single archaeological site, this book serves to raise our awareness of the different perspectives local communities bring to the archaeological past.

References


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\(^2\) See for example Hodder and Berggren 2003.

\(^3\) Schaffer et al 2006?.