

Testimony

(Archive Box No. 4)

Being the final instalment of the archival documentation of White comfort and nationhood reliant upon the historical mythology and invention of 'The Aboriginal Problem'

I. The Local Guardian

I have a duty to report to the Chief Secretary of the inability of a resident from the western district reserve to pay the rent on his wooden cottage. The man has family. He has no work. He is in receipt of assistance — he is also diligent. He is not of the lowest class and demeanour of so many of these people, who are such an irresponsible and worthless category of race that we do not know what it is we will do with them. We do though expect that all who once roamed this land and who have now lost it to conquest must come to realise that they face eventual banishment. Although it is an unfortunate conclusion to reach we feel that even the compliant Aborigine himself (discussed above) must also be banished as he stubbornly refuses to recognise the error of his ways, in that he continues to regard himself as one of them, and at one with them, regardless of the fairness of his hair and lightness of skin that could in time improve both his moral and physical character. (I puzzle, Sir, as to why these light skins do not seek succour and Brotherhood with us. Your wisdom on this matter would be most welcome).

II. The Secretary — Aboriginal Welfare Board

In response to an increasing number of mixed-blood residents demanding some form of recognition as a free people I draw to the attention of all Local Guardians the relevant ordinance(s) in relation to the *Restriction of Movement Act*. In order to be eligible for assistance within the Act adjudication by the relevant authority is determined according to intricate categories of race and colour (a matter on which we have spent many years codifying with due diligence). In order to remove any lingering confusions regarding said categories please allow me clarify. Within the standards contained within the Act race and colour may be mutually dependent. Within the standards of the Act race and colour may be mutually exclusive. Race and colour may be determined — by the size of the skull — by speech pattern — by particular definable traits of the carriage of person — by particular traits of behaviour. Race may be determined by the wink of an eye — a scratch of the left elbow by a Native person. Race may be categorised by suitable displays of deference or *favour*. Race may be determined by a shift in the weather. If in doubt consult relevant scientific data. If this fails to provide evidence regarding individual subjects simply ask the said person if they are in fact Aborigine. The truth will be contained in the *opposite* of whatever they tell you, as they are known to be habitual and cunning liars.

III. The Sub Committee of the Good Ladies Committee of the Aboriginal Welfare Board

We have displayed good kindness to these half-castes. They have during this cold winter past been presented with parcels of our generosity. Carrying the label 'generosity' so as to be sure of our intentions, each parcel was carefully wrapped in brown paper and drawn with coarse string. The parcels themselves did not contain any goods or ration as we feel it best that these children not be spoilt with an act of kindness that has not been pre-determined by their own display of prior effort and an ability and willingness to comply. And yet — despite our kindness, and our clearly stated (and labelled) 'generosity', and our neatly wrapped brown paper parcels, they have refused subsequent orders to work (they did not so much as bow!). The demeanour of these men and women is so universally and extremely insolent that there is so little left to comment on them with the exception that they are 'mischief-makers'. The Secretary of the Sub Committee of The Good Ladies Committee has concluded that where mischief lurks mischief poisons. We will not tolerate the soiling of our land and the name of God due to actions of the lapsed. Therefore, come the winter next, no parcels will be forthcoming until the half-castes oblige us with a suitable display of deference.

IV. The Aboriginal Mother

I am the mother of a soldier who now fights for a country that does not recognise his presence as an Aboriginal man. I am also the wife of a soldier who fell for this country in the Great War. He would eventually spill his blood and lose his life away from the home that has now been taken from us who waited for him to return. I am also the daughter of a woman who beat her feet on this ground and held this earth and told you that which you have refused to hear — that this land is ours. This is our home — traced in her footsteps, and yet my son who wears the uniform of the Empire and carries the bravery medals won by his father at the cost of his own life has been now been told that he has no home here to return to. His uncles are here (also soldiers of the Great War), and are now not permitted to leave here without written permission due to the caste of their skin. His wife is here also, and is not permitted to leave. His children are here and soon will not remember the face of their own father if they are not reunited with him soon. My son faces the dock and the prison cell if he 'trespasses' on his own country. And yet he will return here without doubt, as he loves his family. I love my son dearly and do not wish to see him imprisoned. And yet it will be so according to a word that you call 'law' — but we know to be terror.

V. The Secretary of the Licensing Committee of the Aborigines Welfare Board

The Licensing Committee of the Aborigines Welfare Board have met and discussed the request by the Native woman seeking permission for her Quadroon son to reside on the Native reserve on his return from service with the AIF in New Guinea. The said Quadroon is not a Native as classified under the Act. While he is neither a European of predominantly British stock he is so nearly White that we seek permission from the Chief Secretary to reclassify him as Octroon — which he may not be (biologically defined as such) but is so nearly so in appearance as to be able to 'pass' without undue inquiry or suspicion. As this (at present) Quadroon is so nearly White any return to a Native camp would be of harm to him and the Natives both. Therefore, it is our resolve to charge him with 'trespass' if he does attempt to return to the Native reserve. This has

been adjudged to be of his benefit (although he himself may not fully recognise this). Additionally the Native woman (the mother of the soldier) needs to be dissuaded from writing any further letters of complaint. She is known to be an habitual agitator for Native 'rights' for many decades passing. It is vital that she comes to realise that the Aboriginal Welfare Board while being sympathetic to the Native people of this state will not support the misguided views of this or any other native woman. We must, as Protectors of Aborigines, act in their own interest.

VI. The Half-Caste Agitator

I bring to the attention of the Secretary of the Aboriginal Welfare Board that our ration has recently been reduced to 6/- a week — and in the future, we have been informed, will be paid 'in kind'. But there is no kindness in our imprisonment on this place that we willingly resided on in the past with the view that the land would eventually be ours to control. Our men have no permission to work independently of the slave conditions imposed upon us. The women are unable to leave the reserve to gain employment for themselves. We do not see a strip of meat. We are without boots. Our clothing is rags. All the wood of the forest is cut for the government while our hearth remains empty and cold. We work picking peas yet see no money to purchase a handful of nourishment while the honourable members of the Aboriginal Welfare Board grow fat on our labour and their idleness. If they appear duly satisfied with our situation then let them dine at our table with a bowl of their gruel. If I be punished for my insolence so be it. I am punished already for being dutiful and speaking not at all. I could take up a white man's suit of clothing and a bible, but I prefer the power of writing. I could become obligated but I decline to oblige.

VII. The Duty Constable

We have a man in the district — a free man, of light skin and caste unknown. The man acts with some confusion. Although he claims to be an Aborigine, and descendent of the ancient races previously of this same district, he also demands that he should be treated as an equal alongside the White working man of the land. He also has family here, who are known to illegally house him on the reserve from time to time. He is known to be a great agitator and has become a thorn in the side of the Aboriginal Welfare Board. As a child he was classified as an Aborigine under the Act so that we could rescue him from the old Native habits. He was educated at the schoolhouse on the reserve and at a young age took to the written word and the bible — enterprises praised by the missionary team residing here in times past. He has since taken the pen and used it with violence — demanding cash payment for work, and demanding land for himself and his people. He is of the mistaken opinion (perhaps furnished from a White sympathiser) that his people are entitled to the full respect of the law — a law that we are all fully aware is not their law to partake in. If this man continues in his attempts to use the English language against our generosity then surely it must be taken from him.

VIII. The Director of Surveillance Committee (in relation to 'the Professional Historian')

The Director of the National Surveillance Committee of Natives in consultation with the executive of Aboriginal Welfare and Protection Boards throughout Australia has reached the conclusion that all previously classified Aboriginal families now freed from

the confines of reserves, missions and various secluded enclosures (including prisons, reformatories and remote settlements) who are now at large within the White community will in future be monitored by our officers, supported by confidential monthly written and archived reports containing such information as place of residence, employment, reading material contained in the home, and any gathering with other 'once were' Aborigines (which is strictly forbidden). As this task is a formidable one the eyes and ears of the National Surveillance Committee will be supported by respected members of the community. Therefore we have solicited the assistance of the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker to ensure that all movement of 'once were' Aborigines is diligently documented. Files on each of these people, including medical reports, will be housed within the Archive House of the Nation. The future availability of the material contained within the Archive will be restricted to just one person. He will come to us at a time in the future. He will be known as the Professional Historian — or at times by his nomenclature — 'The Sophisticated One'. (It will easy to identify him. He will be him, and will wear a suit and old school tie, and carry the walk of unquestionable authority and self-assurance). It will be the duty of the Professional Historian to wage a war, a 'History War', in defence of the defenceless — the Aborigine — who knows nothing of 'history' beyond myths and legends. When 'The Sophisticated One' cometh, praise him. And do not ask questions (or request a key to the door!).

'Testimony', being 'archive box no. 4' is the final instalment in a series of works that I have been researching and producing over the last five years. These boxes should be considered as both a creative and political statement in response to the rhetoric of authority that is often constructed around empirical history; a genre that too often disguises its own subjectivity and ideological motivation behind something that, while referring to itself as the truth, denies the truths contained in any competing narratives. I have also been motivated to respond to the travelling 'History Wars' circus, which has done more to stifle the voices of Aboriginal people in recent times than a boatload of imperial warlords armed with gunpowder and a compass.

Tony Birch