

# **‘Socialist paradise’ or ‘inhospitable island’? Visitor responses to Palm Island in the 1920s and 1930s<sup>1</sup>**

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Tourists visiting Queensland’s Palm Island in the 1920s and 1930s followed a well-beaten path. They were ferried there in a launch, either from a larger passenger ship moored in deeper water, or from Townsville on the mainland. Having made it to the shallows, tourists would be carried ‘pick a back’ by a ‘native’ onto a ‘palm-shaded’ beach. Once on the grassy plains that stood back from the beach, they would be treated to performances such as corroborees, war dances and spear-throwing. They were also shown the efforts of the island’s administration: schools full of happy children, hospitals brimming with bonny babies, brass band performances and neat, tree-fringed streets with European-style gardens. Before being piggy-backed to their launches, the tourist could purchase authentic souvenirs, such as boomerangs and shields. As the ship pulled away from paradise, tourists could gaze back and reflect on this model Aboriginal settlement, its impressive ‘native displays’, its ‘efficient management’ and the ‘noble work’ of its staff and missionaries.<sup>2</sup>

By the early 1920s, the Palm Island Aboriginal reserve had become a major Queensland tourist destination. It offered tourists – particularly those from the southern states or from overseas – a chance to see Aboriginal people and culture as part of a comfortable day trip. Travellers to and around Australia had taken a keen interest in Aboriginal culture and its artefacts since Captain Cook commented on the ‘rage for curiosities amongst his crew’.<sup>3</sup> From the 1880s, missions such as Lake Tyers in Victoria’s Gippsland region had attracted

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2 ‘Caravan tales’, *The Queenslander*, 20 June 1929: 4; ‘Palm Island, North Queensland’, *Singleton Argus*, 12 June 1931: 2; Watson 2010: 42; ‘Palm Island, North Queensland winter tours’, *Brisbane Courier*, 28 June 1929: 3; ‘A holiday trip in the north’, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 3 June 1921: 6; ‘Life in North Queensland: A southern visitor’s impressions’, *Worker* (Brisbane), 7 October 1931: 18. Some of the archaic terminology in these contemporary accounts may offend readers today. I quote these words because the casual way in which they were used betray deeply held views of the time.

3 White 2005: 13.

organised tour groups.<sup>4</sup> However, the development of government reserves in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the industrialisation of tourist transport particularly large ocean-going liners, the opening up of previously remote areas such as north Queensland and popular interest in racial paradigms meant that the inter-war years were a boom period for tourism to Aboriginal settlements.

What were visitors' responses to the Aboriginal people of Palm Island? That is the question that this article will consider. Historians have tended to characterise tourist interest in Aboriginal people from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries as examples of a widespread interest in so-called 'primitive' cultures. Such cultures were rendered exotic by their supposed antiquity: they were seen as unchanging and incapable of change. As Jane Lydon has shown, visitors to the Coranderrk mission in Victoria at the turn of the century were fascinated by the 'relics of savagery'.<sup>5</sup> Even by the 1930s, primitivism seemed to remain the primary appeal of Aboriginal culture. Thom Blake and Sianan Healy have argued that audience reactions to Aboriginal performances of boomerang throwing and historical re-enactments of frontier conflict were limited by the stereotypes of primitivism. Jillian Barnes and Lynette Russell have shown that popular travel writers of the mid twentieth century were fascinated by 'stone-age' hunters. Maria Nugent has argued that despite efforts by Aboriginal people to position themselves as historical actors, the main attraction of 1920s visits to Sydney's La Perouse Aboriginal Government reserve was the chance to effectively journey back in time to see and souvenir an ancient culture.<sup>6</sup>

The example of Palm Island both confirms and complicates this characterisation of tourist interest in Aboriginal people. While the language of primitivism was ubiquitous in descriptions of Palm Island – especially in its marketing – visitors were often interested in other things as well, such as the ability of the state to care for vulnerable and victimised people and prepare them for modern society. Of course, it mattered who the visitors were and for whom they were writing their observations. This article will consider a range of sources – mostly journalism and popular travel writing, but also official publications of the Queensland Tourist Bureau, personal letters and visitor's books comments – and how the intentions of the visitor coloured their descriptions.

Visitors to Palm Island had different reasons for making the journey and arrived with differing preconceptions about Aboriginal people: preconceptions that could be confirmed or challenged after a visit to the reserve. This article will consider just some of the visitor characterisations of the people on Palm Island: primitive, yes, but also fortunate, sophisticated, warlike and victimised. It will also consider the tourist gaze as being both emblematic of popular ideas about Aboriginal people in the 1920s and 1930s and subject to its own specific ways

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4 Carolane 2008.

5 Lydon 2005: 190.

6 Blake 2001: 178–189; Healy 2006: 19; Russell 2001: 32; Barnes 2007, 2013; Nugent 2005: 74–77. See also Attwood 1989.

of seeing. As tourism theorist John Urry has shown, the tourist gaze reduces all spectacle to a 'site of pleasure'.<sup>7</sup> What was it, exactly, that made the spectacle of Aboriginal life on Palm Island a pleasurable experience for visitors?

## The Palm Island penal settlement

The *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* (Qld) was created as a temporary measure to protect Aboriginal people from the vices of modern society, but in effect was a permanent restriction on individual freedoms. Prior to 1897 the only 'reserves' in Queensland were church-run missions, however, following the Act, the Queensland Government established state-run institutions where Aboriginal people were forced to live and work and their children attend school. The largest of these was Barambah (later Cherbourg) in south-east Queensland. In terms of population, this was closely followed by Palm Island, in tropical north Queensland, which was established in 1918.<sup>8</sup> This process occurred somewhat later in Queensland than it did in New South Wales and Victoria. By the time Queensland had gazetted government reserves, interest in Aboriginal people was shifting from one of 'protectionism' to 'assimilation' – a shift that affected Palm Island and the tourist gaze.

Palm Island was a prison. The site was not chosen for its picturesque qualities: it was supposed to inhibit escapes.<sup>9</sup> It was the receiving centre for 'troublesome cases' from settlements on the mainland. 'Crimes' that could land a person in Palm Island were often trivial. Men were sent there for agitating for better wages and conditions, 'stirring up fights' or sleeping with another man's wife. Women could be sent there for having children to a white father, as could anyone suffering from venereal disease.<sup>10</sup> Transfers to Palm Island often seemed arbitrary, serving as a form of behaviour control. As one resident of a mainland mission recalled, 'They had only to mention Palm Island and we were quiet'. Such a population has led Joanne Watson to characterise it as a 'detention centre for political prisoners'.<sup>11</sup>

Once on Palm Island, inmates were subject to a raft of restrictions: men had to work a 24-hour week (usually without pay) or be banished to nearby Eclipse Island.<sup>12</sup> Children lived in dormitories separated from their parents whom they were only allowed to see for restricted hours on weekends. There were bans on meetings and gatherings, restrictions on relationships between men and

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7 Urry 1990: 125.

8 May 1991; Watson 2010: 18.

9 Watson 2010: 33. See also *Beautiful One Day* 2012 and Hooper 2008 for details of life on Palm Island.

10 Chaplain at Mitchell River Mission to Rev ER Gribble, 24 April 1931, Gribble Papers Box 8, 11/7, Mitchell Library; Bishop of North Queensland to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 10 July 1934, Gribble Papers Box 8, 11/8; May 1991; Watson 2010: 37. If suffering, or recovering from a venereal disease, inmates were sent to adjacent Fantome Island.

11 Watson 2010: 19.

12 Watson 2010: 39.

women, and curfews.<sup>13</sup> Palm Island was also unhealthy: insufficient rations led to malnutrition, diseases such as scurvy, scabies and impetigo were rampant and its death rate was almost twice that of the rest of Queensland.<sup>14</sup>

Escapes were common. In 1932 alone there were 51 attempted escapes, including a mass breakout of 19 people.<sup>15</sup> Such events were often condescendingly ascribed to the tendency of Aboriginal people to 'go walkabout'.<sup>16</sup> In 1930, the Superintendent of Palm Island Robert Curry went on a violent rampage during which he murdered his own children, torched buildings and shot the island's doctor. In the end it was an inmate, Peter Prior, who was ordered to shoot Curry in defence of the island's population. Prior, although acting under orders from his prison guard, was charged with murder.<sup>17</sup>

Almost immediately after its establishment, the Palm Island penal settlement became a tourist destination. By 1921 it was being visited by small parties of tourists on fishing trips up the Great Barrier Reef, and by the late 1920s it formed part of the itinerary of winter pleasure cruises or train trips along the northern Queensland coast.<sup>18</sup> In 1928, 60 passengers journeyed by train from Melbourne to Cairns with stops at Brisbane, Gympie and Townsville, and visits to Magnetic Island and Palm Island, as part of a 'Reso' tour for Victorian businessmen.<sup>19</sup> In 1929 a 'large number' of tourists aboard the Howard Smith Co inter-state liner the SS *Canberra* took advantage of the side trip to Palm Island.<sup>20</sup>

The tourist exploitation of places like Palm Island provided revenue for cash-strapped reserves and was a chance for administrators to showcase their supposedly efficient management of this 'model settlement'.<sup>21</sup> It also offered the Queensland Government Tourist Bureau a place to showcase what was one of the main drawcards of tropical holidays: authentic Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal 'protection' and tourism were closely intertwined in this period. For instance, Archibald Meston, whose recommendations led directly to the creation of the 1897 Act and who was Protector of Aborigines in Southern Queensland from 1903–1910, also wrote a guidebook to Queensland in 1891, was the Director of Aboriginal performance group 'Wild Australia' and was Director of the Queensland Government Tourist Bureau in Sydney from 1910.<sup>22</sup>

13 May 1991; *Beautiful One Day* 2012.

14 'Palm Island, treatment of natives, Dr Bancroft's view', *Brisbane Courier*, 30 July 1932: 14; Watson 2010: 39.

15 Watson 2010: 47.

16 'Film production, Among the Aborigines, experiences at Palm Island', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 November 1935: 7.

17 Watson 2010: Chapter 5.

18 'A holiday trip in the north', *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 3 June 1921: 6.

19 'RESO Tour, seeing the State, southern visitors', *Brisbane Courier*, 16 March 1928: 14; RESO Tour, visit to Palm Island, natives stage corroboree' *Brisbane Courier*, 27 June 1928: 17.

20 'Palm Island, North Queensland winter tours', *Brisbane Courier*, 28 June 1929: 3.

21 Watson 2010: 53. At Yarrabah mission, near Cairns, for instance, donations from visitors and cash paid for souvenirs totalled 582 pounds in 1925. Considering that there were 372 residents on Yarrabah and that it cost '10 pounds per annum to feed, clothe and train an aboriginal' this was a significant contribution to the mission's economy. *ABM Review*, 18:2, 12 May 1926: 45–47.

22 Meston 1891; Stephens 1974; Lergessner 2009: 85–92.

## Fortunate

Instead of seeing a prison, most visitors saw a paradise. In 1929, *The Queenslander's* 'journalist correspondent' was told that 'the aboriginals had expressed a desire to settle here' and never wanted to leave. This came as no surprise to the writer because 'In Palm Island the natives have found the nearest thing to utopia'.<sup>23</sup> In the same year, an article titled 'Abo's Paradise' in the *Sydney Morning Herald* waxed lyrical about the island's 'crystal clear coral seas, glistening waters of deepest blue' and its 'swaying cocoanut trees richly laden with fruit'. The *Sydney Morning Herald* assured its readers that rather than a place of forced labour, Palm Island was a 'socialist' paradise where men 'only need' work a 24-hour week to be entitled to rations 'wholesome and ample'.<sup>24</sup>

None of the many newspaper articles about Palm Island as a tourist destination, nor individual tourist responses, mention the fact that it was a prison. It is likely that many visitors simply did not know the truth. Life on Palm Island was 'performed' for tourists, rather than observed, and it seems that most Australians, especially those in the southern states, were unaware of Palm Island's true function. Even someone as prominent in Aboriginal affairs as the Reverend William Morley, the secretary for the Association for the Protection of Native Races based in Sydney, only had an inkling. In 1932 he asked the Anglican chaplain on Palm Island Reverend E. R. Gribble, 'why do they go there, do they suffer from homesickness ... is it at all a sort of penal settlement for natives'? These suspicions were swiftly confirmed by Gribble.<sup>25</sup>

Morley's letter also shows that some people may have at least heard rumours of Palm Island's true function. However, seeing prisons as humane places, if not utopias, has been a common response of tourists. Tourists to 'reform' prisons in the mid nineteenth century saw them as fine examples of enlightenment ideals, while those visiting modern, 'motel-style', prisons in the later twentieth century often thought they molly-coddled the inhabitants.<sup>26</sup> Rather than see hardships – as was the case through tourism to de-commissioned prisons such as Port Arthur – tourists were usually encouraged to see still-functioning prisons as embodying the best efforts of the state.<sup>27</sup> Travel writing about Palm Island tended to see this socialist paradise as 'consolation' for the fact that a 'cruel civilisation' had taken Aboriginal people's land from them.<sup>28</sup> Visitor accounts were often sensitive to colonial injustices, yet regarded Palm Island as their solution, rather than part of the problem. In this respect, inmates were lucky to be there.<sup>29</sup>

23 'Caravan tales', *The Queenslander*, 20 June 1929: 4.

24 'Palm Island, Abo's paradise', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 1929: 11.

25 Morley to Gribble, 12 November 1932, 25 February 1933, Gribble Papers, Box 8 (69), Folder 1.

26 Wilson 2008: 33–34, 46.

27 Porter 1934: 132; Young 1996.

28 'Palm Island, Abo's paradise', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 1929: 11.

29 The opposite effect, where tourists see ex-prisons and concentration camps as paradigmatic of the problematic nature of modernity, has been characterised as 'dark tourism'. See Lennon and Foley 2006.

There were voices that raised objections. Christian humanitarian activists such as Morley and Gribble considered the 'exhibition' of Aboriginal people to tourists to be the most objectionable form of 'exploitation'.<sup>30</sup> Occasionally a journalist would attempt to peer beyond the façade of perfection offered to tourists. A caustic article for the *Brisbane Courier* noted:

there are thousands of well-to-do people, who have made their wealth in Queensland at the expense of the aboriginals, living in comfort whilst the remnant of the black race is slowly dying on a most inhospitable island ... to make the place attractive to tourists seems the principal objective. The welfare of the blacks is quite a secondary consideration.<sup>31</sup>

The rare tourist who was able to break away from the group and do some sightseeing on their own could also see and hear things which did not fit comfortably with the image of paradise. For instance, in 1934 a visitor from the Queensland town of Mt Isa decided that he had 'little in common' with the group of Italians with whom he was travelling and broke away from the group. During his solo wanderings he was able to strike up a conversation with some inmates. As a result he 'gleaned some astounding inside knowledge of the filth, debauchery and carelessness to which these unhappy natives are constantly subjected'. For instance, he asks, 'How many tourists realise that nearly 25% of the dark population on Palm Island are suffering from venereal disease chiefly syphilis?'<sup>32</sup> While tourists were generally shown a selective vision of life on Palm Island, visits there could serve to unsettle preconceptions and educate members of the public about Aboriginal injustices. Also, there is something in the visitor from Mt Isa's account that suggests he was rather enjoying his time 'off the beaten track' and getting an experience 'the Italians' were missing out on. Inconvenient, hidden truths could also be sources of tourist pleasure.<sup>33</sup>

## Primitive

As far as the Queensland Government Tourist Bureau was concerned, Palm Island offered a venue to discover one of the most interesting things about the tropical north: living examples of primitive peoples and their ancient cultures. In 1938 the Bureau commissioned the writer and future founder of the literary journal *Meanjin*, Clem Christesen, to write a full-length book advertising the delights of the northern state. In *Queensland Journey*, Christesen invoked the romance of the tropics: beaches, reefs, sleeping turtles, dugong cows and Aborigines with their 'moonlight corroborees amid cocoanut groves' and their 'age-old native love songs'.<sup>34</sup> In the introduction to *Queensland Journey*, the Brisbane scholar

30 Morley to Gribble, 25 February 1933, Gribble Papers, Box 8 (69), Folder 1.

31 'Palm Island, treatment of natives, Dr Bancroft's view', *Brisbane Courier*, 30 July 1932: 14.

32 Illegible (possibly 'Macregor') to Bishop Needham, 11 May 1934, Gribble Papers Box 8 (69), Folder 1, 11/8.

33 See Buzard 1993.

34 Christesen 1938: 240, 244. Literary figures often ended up writing travel guides to Queensland, for instance EJ Banfield and Alexander Vennard, both journalists, ended up writing travel stories



## 'SOCIALIST PARADISE' OR 'INHOSPITABLE ISLAND'?

Frederick Walter Robinson noted that Queensland had many attractions to offer the southern visitor, such as its winter climate and tropical vegetation. 'Least of all', Robinson wrote, 'do we realise':

the privilege of having still in Queensland an aboriginal life more primitive than anywhere else in the world. The weapons and implements that ethnologists in other countries must dig to find in age-old strata of the earth, we find upon the earth's surface or in the very hands of primitive man himself.<sup>35</sup>

Such characterisations of Aboriginal people reflected the global preoccupation with primitive cultures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The attraction – for anthropologists, tourists, artists and writers alike – was that non-western cultures offered a glimpse of the early stages of human development. If life shared a single origin, as proposed by Charles Darwin, then African, Southeast Asian and Oceanic societies offered an insight into the origins of all life. In this way 'primitives' occupied an entirely different time continuum than did western cultures; they were, in theorist Marianna Torgovnik's phrase, 'eternally past and eternally present', rather than showing a path of linear development.<sup>36</sup> Anthropologists and scientists often concluded that Aboriginal Australians were not just one of the oldest examples of human life but *the* oldest, famously noted in Sir Baldwin Spencer's *The Arunta: Study of a Stone-age People*.<sup>37</sup>

Popular travel literature of the 1930s eagerly reproduced such claims. In 1933 Charles Holmes, general manager of the newly established Australian National Travel Association (ANTA) and author of travelogue *We Find Australia* stated that Aboriginal people were 'the common ancestor for all modern races', a fact that was regarded as a tremendous tourist asset.<sup>38</sup> Holmes did much to popularise the idea of Australia's 'stone-age' culture being a desirable tourist commodity. The title of ANTA's *Walkabout* magazine co-opted a well-known Aboriginal expression, and its stories described visits with 'stone-age' Aboriginal people.<sup>39</sup> Holmes also exploited the possibilities of photography in order to emphasise the apparent primitivism of Aboriginal men. He helped to facilitate the travels of Swiss celebrity photographer E. O. Hoppe during his 1930 visit to Australia: a visit which saw the dissemination of several images of Aboriginal 'tribesmen' and 'war dances' on Palm Island.<sup>40</sup>

For many visitors to Palm Island, Aboriginal performances were the embodiment of primitivism. Reports consistently described corroborees and boomerang throwing as 'primitive' or examples of the culture of 'past days'.<sup>41</sup> Gazing on

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for Queensland newspapers.

35 Christesen 1938: 5.

36 Torgovnick 1990: 186.

37 Spencer 1927, 1928; Klaatsch 1923.

38 Holmes 1933: 138; Barnes 2013: 5–6. See also McGuire 1939; Hoppe c1935; Milford 1934.

39 Barnes 2007: 96.

40 Howe and Esau 2007: 17, 198–199.

41 For instance, 'Caravan tales', *The Queenslander*, 20 June 1929: 4; 'Palm Island, Abo's paradise', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 1929: 11.

the origins of humanity was interesting in itself, but it was given a pleasureable frisson of exoticism by the fact that these origins were otherworldly, or 'weird'. Descriptions of corroborees and 'war dances' tended to emphasise their eeriness, a quality embodied in the dancers themselves. Performers were 'demon-like figures' dancing their 'debil-debil' dances filled with 'weird' and 'grotesque movements' and the music that accompanied them was the 'weird strains of a boomerang band'.<sup>42</sup> While some accounts of corroborees in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries pointed out their rhythmic precision and resemblance to Russian ballet, this did not seem to be the case with descriptions from visitors to Palm Island who seemed to be entranced by the intrinsic otherworldliness of the dancing.<sup>43</sup>

Corroborees were not only 'weird', they were also 'melancholy'.<sup>44</sup> Such melancholy came not just from the atmosphere produced by the dancers, but also the knowledge that those dancing were members of a 'doomed race'. The 'doomed race' theory argued that due to the competition between races, Aboriginal people would inevitably die out.<sup>45</sup> As Archibald Meston put it, the fact that the 'Australian blacks are moving rapidly into ... eternal darkness' was one of 'those inexorable laws' of nature.<sup>46</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, such beliefs were almost universal.<sup>47</sup> The possibility that Aboriginal people were, in fact, not doomed to extinction was beginning to become apparent to missionaries, anthropologists and state protectors by the 1920s, nevertheless it still proved an exotic way of seeing Aboriginal people.<sup>48</sup> In 1929, the *Sydney Morning Herald* could describe a Palm Island corroboree thus: 'By the flickering lights of the camp fire, with all the superstitious awe of past days, these poor survivors of a fast vanishing race chant their sad dirges.'<sup>49</sup> The threat of seemingly inevitable extinction imbued Palm Island performances with a kind of exquisite melancholy.

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42 'Palm Island, Abo's paradise', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 1929: 11; 'The Cairns tour by sea', *Singleton Argus*, 25 April 1932: 4; 'Australia's tropical allure', *Horsham Times*, 29 June 1934: 10. See also Blake 2001: 185; Parsons 1997: 52, 64. Film director Charles Chauvel had this effect in mind when filming the 1936 feature *Uncivilised* on Palm Island, with inmates as actors. In one scene, Aboriginal men perform a corroboree in which their bodies gyrate, bathed in shadow and flickering torch light, to the shock of a white woman in the audience. The staged eeriness of the corroboree also provided dramatic atmosphere as the backdrop to a murder.

43 Hoppe c1935: 194; Parsons 2002: 16.

44 In this they seem to echo Marcus Clarke's famous characterisation of the Australian landscape and its Indigenous people some 50 years earlier as possessing a 'weird melancholy'. Writing about corroborees: 'From a corner of the silent forest rises a dismal chant, and around a fire, dance natives painted like skeletons. All is fear-inspiring and gloomy.' Clarke 1892: 'Preface'.

45 McGregor 1997: 48.

46 Archibald Meston quoted in Reynolds 2008: 101.

47 Reynolds 1993.

48 May 1991.

49 'Palm Island, Abo's paradise', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 1929: 11.



## Timeless

Primitivism was, as Johannes Fabian put it in a critique of anthropology, a form of 'time-based othering'.<sup>50</sup> Aboriginal reserves offered tourists, in essence, a chance to travel back in time: to look through history at an ancient and almost extinct past. Maria Nugent, too, has written that the tram trip from the city of Sydney to the Aboriginal reserve at La Perouse could be imagined as a trip back in time.<sup>51</sup> In the case of Palm Island such a feeling was dramatised by the fact it was an island some distance from the mainland. A journey of 40 miles from Townsville across the water and the tourist was 'among things primitive'.<sup>52</sup> The sea voyage to Palm Island emphasised the sense of departure from the ordinary to the extraordinary, an important ingredient in tourist delight and pleasure.<sup>53</sup>

For many observers, so-called primitive people not only *inhabited* a different time, but they themselves had a different sense of time. Belgian anthropologists in the 1870s, when studying Aboriginal performers touring Europe, observed that they spent money quickly and gave it away because they 'live unconscious of time' and 'think only of the day'.<sup>54</sup> German travellers in Africa in the late nineteenth century observed that the fundamental difference between themselves and the locals was their respective attitudes to time: Africans had 'no concept of the value of time'.<sup>55</sup> At Palm Island travellers were fascinated with the 'easy care-free life of the aboriginals' and their willingness to 'bask in the sun on the beach'.<sup>56</sup>

Freedom from time may have also contributed to ideas, popular since the Enlightenment, that primitive people, especially those in the tropics, were lazy.<sup>57</sup> Laziness was a quality often associated with Palm Island and Palm Islanders. Palm Island was, along with Lindeman and Dunk islands, part of a group often referred to as the 'lazy isles'.<sup>58</sup> Visual imagery often emphasised the apparent connections between a lazy way of life on a tropical island and the ancient culture of Aboriginal people. A photograph in the Brisbane *Courier Mail* of a silhouette of two Palm Islanders resting in the shade of a palm tree with their spears, was captioned 'In the Lazy Isles'.<sup>59</sup>

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50 Fabian 1983: 13–18.

51 Nugent 2005: 74.

52 'Caravan tales', *The Queenslander*, 20 June 1929: 4. Aboriginal Australia is still described as occupying a different sense of time to modern Australia, and visits to it, therefore, as a form of time travel. Tourist literature about the Northern Territory regularly describes the 'traditional' communities, their 'ancient ceremonies and rituals' and 'timeless culture'. See, for example: Oz Outback, Aboriginal ceremonies from Northern Australia, <http://ozoutback.com.au/Australia/abcerna/index.html>, East Arnhem Land Tourist Association, <http://www.ealta.org/> (accessed 22 January 2013).

53 Urry 1990: 135.

54 Poignant 2004: 127. These performers were captured from Palm Island.

55 Reimann-Dawe 2011: 23.

56 'RESO Tour, visit to Palm Island, natives stage corroboree', *Brisbane Courier*, 27 June 1928: 17.

57 See Konishi 2010, 2012: 127; White 2005: 39–50.

58 *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 10 February 1935: 25.

59 *Courier-Mail*, 16 February 1935: 18.

For tourists, places where time moves slowly and where the locals have a laid-back attitude to time make attractive holiday destinations. That one goes on holiday to escape rigid senses of time – to live ‘outside time’ as it were – is still a central idea to tourism. And it is still conflated with ‘underdeveloped’ nations or ‘simpler’ places, especially those in the tropics.<sup>60</sup> Pacific Islands in particular have been seen as places where to laze, to be idle, is to simply adapt to local culture.<sup>61</sup> Laziness and primitivism combined into an attractive tourist package in early-twentieth-century tourist literature about Pacific islands. One 1931 advertisement announced steamship passages to the ‘picturesque south sea island’ where the tourist can experience ‘Fascinating native life... primitive... picturesque... and a languorous lure that invites you to laze away the days and nights in the glorious south seas.’<sup>62</sup> Palm Island was often described as ‘Pacific’, not just because of its ‘palm-shaded’ beaches, but also because of the behaviour of its inhabitants. As one correspondent noted, ‘natives’ came down to meet the tourist boats, just like they do in Fiji.<sup>63</sup> Palm Island combined two important and connected time-based tourist pleasures: a place to see the oldest race on earth; and a place that had relaxed, Pacific, attitudes to time.

## Sophisticated

Descriptions of a timeless, stone-age people were complicated by the awareness that performances on Palm Island had been ‘arranged for the entertainment of visitors’, rather than being spontaneous or related to spiritual belief and cultural practices.<sup>64</sup> This seemed to undermine the authenticity of Aboriginal performances and souvenirs. A 1932 *Country Life* photo spread featured an image of an Aboriginal ‘chief’s grave’ next to one of ‘Palm Island blacks’ in ‘full war paint’. The caption read: the grave of ‘possibly the last of a long line of chiefs and his sophisticated descendents commercialising their once-solemn ritual’.<sup>65</sup> Distinctions between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ Aboriginal people and culture, were regularly made in the early twentieth century. For instance, American tourists were lampooned for returning from La Perouse under the impression

60 The characterisation of Mexico as a place where everything is done ‘manana’ comes to mind.

61 A phrase, ‘Islander Time’, often used self-mockingly, has recently developed in the twenty-first century to describe it.

62 *Queenslander Annual*, 12 October 1931: 26 (ellipses in original).

63 ‘Caravan tales’, *The Queenslander*, 20 June 1929: 4.

64 ‘Life in North Queensland: a southern visitor’s impressions’, *Worker* (Brisbane), 7 October 1931: 18.

65 *Country Life Annual*, 20 December 1932: 28. Such distinctions continued. For instance, in 2012 the federal Opposition-leader Tony Abbott declared that while he was pleased that an Indigenous person – MP Ken Wyatt – had been elected to the House of Representatives for the first time, he did note that Wyatt was an ‘urban Aboriginal’. Abbott stated: ‘I think it would be terrific if, as well as having an urban Aboriginal in our parliament, we had an Aboriginal person from central Australia, an authentic representative of the ancient cultures of central Australia in the parliament.’ See: ‘Abbott wants “authentic” outback Aborigines in coalition with Wyatt’, *The Australian*, 13 November 2012; ‘Abbott in trouble again after “urban Aboriginal” remark’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 2012.

that they had encountered a 'dinkum Aussie black'.<sup>66</sup> European 'experts' tended to distinguish between the sacred dances of desert or northern people and the corroborees given for tourists or visitors in southern states.<sup>67</sup> Palm Island, perhaps by virtue of its role as within civilisation, yet containing a population from beyond the frontier, was a slightly different case. Here corroborees were usually regarded as facsimiles of ancient practices, if not the actual object.

Several historians have noted the ways in which Aboriginal people have been active participants in the tourist transaction, albeit within an asymmetrical power structure. Barnes has noted that Walpiri men in central Australia in the mid twentieth century used their presence in ANTA photographs as bargaining tools and demanded, and received, economic recompense.<sup>68</sup> Kleinert has observed that Aboriginal people used the tropes of primitivism as a 'screen': simultaneously performing versions of their heritage while protecting and shielding more sensitive cultural practices from prying eyes.<sup>69</sup> It is likely that the 'weirdness' and 'war like' nature of Aboriginal performances on Palm Island were not just the result of tourist preconceptions, but also due to Aboriginal people exploiting the stereotypes.

At Palm Island, seeing Aboriginal people take part in an economic transaction was, itself, a source of pleasure for the tourist, and often just as exotic as 'primitive displays'. One journalist enthusiastically described a 'war dance':

Donning the war paint of red and white ochre in fantastic stripes on their bodies, the natives entertain the visitors with their chanting to the beat of stick against stick, and the rhythm of the slap of the hollowed palm to the thigh, they work themselves up to a great state of excitement, making the entertainment very realistic.

But then:

Carried away by the spirit of the primitive displays by the natives, the visitors are suddenly brought back to earth and commerce by the voice of a native peddling his wares in a vernacular worthy of "Paddy's" market' selling 'boomerangs, coral and red-berry necklaces, spears, shields, shells and such-like'.<sup>70</sup>

A similar sense of surprise accompanied performances of popular culture. For instance, as well as 'debil debil' and 'ibis' dances, Reso travellers were also presented with a parody of the Charleston.<sup>71</sup> Instead of singing 'in their native tongue', children surprised tourists with popular hits of the day such as 'It Ain't

66 'Sydney day by day', *The Argus* (Melbourne), 7 March 1935: 10; 'Mainland notes, teasing the tourist', *Mercury* (Hobart), 27 February 1932: 6. See also Berzins 2007: 26; Spencer 1928: 16.

67 Parsons 2002: 24.

68 Barnes 2013: 10–11.

69 Kleinert 2010: 173. See also Lydon, 2005: 178; Errington 2010: 81; Nugent 2005: 76–77; Parsons 2002: 17.

70 'Palm Island, North Queensland', *Singleton Argus*, 12 June 1931: 2.

71 'Reso tourists', *Brisbane Courier*, 20 June 1928: 14.

Gonna Rain No More' and 'Yes, We Have No Bananas'.<sup>72</sup> The correspondent noted the irony in choosing a song about having no bananas to perform in a tropical paradise, however, did not comment on a phenomenon perhaps taken for granted at the time: that of Aboriginal people often being regarded through a 'prism ... which was cut by the minstrels'.<sup>73</sup> In this sense, the song choice does not seem ironic, but purposeful: there to satisfy Australian ideals of black-ness.

Glimpses behind the façade of tourist performances were, themselves, the subject of reportage at Palm Island. In 1932 *The Queenslander* published a full-page photo spread of a 'Wayside Eden'. This page contrasted a photograph of a group of Palm Islanders in their 'visiting day rig' (wearing body paint, holding spears) with a photograph in their 'everyday dress when the tourists have departed'.<sup>74</sup> Reports on the tourist process itself were particularly relevant for local Queensland newspapers keen to report on the development of a tourist industry and the ways in which southerners were being seduced by romantic ideas of primitivism.

As Urry has noted, seeing through the façade of tourist performances is, itself, one of the pleasures of the tourist.<sup>75</sup> In effect it makes tourists 'in on the joke'. On reserves, this impulse was racialised. Some observers seemed to find pleasure in the disjunction between 'primitive' and 'modern' performances and in the fact that these supposedly primitive people were not behaving in stereotypically 'primitive' ways. The fact that Aboriginal people had adapted to modern society to the degree that they could 'perform' their culture and benefit economically from such performances was, itself, a novelty. Clearly, the fact it was a novelty showed how firm the condescending ideas of primitivism were. And yet, tourism did provide a venue which, in a limited way, unsettled preconceptions about Aboriginal people.

## Warlike

Another common response to the inmates of Palm Island was that they were inherently violent. Although 'mock tribal wars' were staged for the benefit of tourists, writers often reminded their readers that those performing had a history of and the potential for violence. A 1929 account by a visiting American yachtsman described Palm Island as a place where the presence of 'warring tribes' made him fear for his life and where the violent implications of the corroboree were such that he 'hoped it would not be carried too far'. This ripping yarn situated the adventurer as off the beaten track, despite the fact that Palm Island was, by this time, receiving mass tourist visits, local Aboriginal people posed for 'countless photographs' for the yacht's crew and they departed 'literally

72 'Palm Island, North Queensland', *Singleton Argus*, 12 June 1931: 2.

73 Waterhouse 1990: 100.

74 'A wayside Eden', *The Queenslander*, 7 July 1932: 21.

75 Urry 1990: 11.

bursting' with souvenirs.<sup>76</sup> Upon returning home, Australian tourists too were able to convert their trips to Palm Island into adventure yarns: photographs of war dances and anecdotes of spears being thrown helped paint a picture of a life-threatening trip to a strange and savage world.<sup>77</sup>

As crude as this characterisation was, it does indicate at least some historical awareness of the reality of Palm Island's history. The Aboriginal people on Palm Island, a combination of indigenous inhabitants and those that had been brought from mainland Queensland, represented a huge diversity of tribal and language groups (although there is no evidence to suggest that 'warring tribes' was anything but a primitivist fantasy).<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, they were often survivors of wars against colonial expansion, which observers acknowledged by stating that their ancestors had 'speared those explorers who penetrated into that dark wilderness'.<sup>79</sup> 'Dispersals' were still occurring in Australia in the 1920s – the Coniston Massacre of 1928 was widely reported and commented on – and the knowledge of the frontier would have formed the backdrop to fears of violence. Although, for this characterisation to work, inmates had to be painted as the aggressors of frontier violence, rather than its victims.

## Civilised

Some traveller accounts did regard the inmates as victims of settler expansion and land grabs. As we saw earlier, many accounts regarded the fact that Palm Island was a 'paradise' to be suitable consolation for past injustices. Given this, several accounts demonstrated an eagerness to see what kind of care and opportunities for employment and education the Government was providing, opportunities that would enable Aboriginal people to become 'civilised' and, possibly, to assimilate. Commentators often expressed their delight when they saw examples of reform and education on Palm Island: 'Into this tropic paradise has crept civilisation, for the Government is teaching its black subjects how to keep themselves'.<sup>80</sup> 'Keeping oneself' could be displayed in various ways such as care of babies, education, work, music or sport.

Those on the 1929 Howard Smith Co. cruise, for example, saw the island's school for 120 children up to third grade where the students all 'seem bright and cheerful'.<sup>81</sup> Journalists were keen to point out that 'lady tourists' particularly

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76 Brown 1935: 51–59. Even the title of the account *Horizon's Rim* indicates the author's intent to go to places beyond the normal. For an account of the modern traveller's desire to be 'not a tourist', see Buzard 1993: 6.

77 'Girls' club', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 29 September 1931: 10.

78 'Manbarra' describes pre-settlement owners and custodians of the land and 'Bwgcolman' the descendents of those deported to Palm Island from other parts of Queensland. Watson 2010: 18–19, 40.

79 'Palm Island, Abo's paradise', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 1929: 11; 'Our tropic coast', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 17 March 1934: 8. At La Perouse, Aboriginal people sold boomerangs decorated with the (non-peaceful) Aboriginal response to Cook's landing. Nugent 2005: 84.

80 'Our tropic coast', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 17 March 1934: 8.

81 'Palm Island, North Queensland winter tours', *Brisbane Courier*, 28 June 1929: 3.

enjoyed seeing healthy babies at the island's hospital.<sup>82</sup> In the 1870s, according to Lydon, Aboriginal women's 'conformance to respectable domesticity' was one of the most visible indicators of the good management of reserves.<sup>83</sup> By the 1920s, domesticity seems to have been reconfigured as mothercraft. This was possibly in response to the hysterical news reports, paraphrasing anthropologist Daisy Bates, about Aboriginal infanticide in the early 1920s.<sup>84</sup> Palm Island administration was determined to show off their successes in instructing Aboriginal mothers in the ways of modern child-rearing.

Some visitors seemed especially keen to see evidence of Aboriginal industriousness, especially those with an interest in the potential economic benefits of reserve labour. 'Reso' tours – an abbreviation for 'resources' – were an annual train service designed to connect city businessmen to rural primary producers, established by the Victorian Railways Resource Development Branch in 1922.<sup>85</sup> In 1928 some 60 Resonians travelled up the Queensland coast meeting and talking to sugar cane growers and other farmers. Their travels and positive responses were enthusiastically reported by local newspapers who considered their trip a great boon to Queensland, not just because of potential investment but because of the publicity they would generate for the region as a tourist destination.<sup>86</sup>

At Palm Island the Resonians were, like other visitors, shown corroborees and met with tribal 'chiefs', but they also seemed especially eager to hear about the productive involvement of Aboriginal men in the island's timber-felling, tropical fruit and sugar cane industries. They were also interested to hear that men were 'hired' to pastoralists for station work and had accumulated considerable savings because of this work.<sup>87</sup> Barnes has argued that Resonians considered 'undeveloped' parts of Australia such as the desert centre to possess 'unlimited possibilities', as long as Aboriginal people were replaced with industrious Europeans.<sup>88</sup> However, Palm Island seemed to offer Resonians examples of ways in which the cheap labour of Aboriginal people could help to make remote Australia more productive. Making reserves productive could also resolve settler 'land hunger', which had resulted in reserves, especially in the southern states, centralised and so-called 'half-castes' ejected to reduce population numbers.<sup>89</sup>

82 'Palm Island, North Queensland', *Singleton Argus*, 12 June 1931: 2.

83 Lydon 2005: 178.

84 For example, 'Cannibalism in Western Australia, revolting allegations', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 May 1921: 11; 'Aboriginals still cannibals', *Barrier Miner*, 13 May 1921: 4; and 'Cannibalism in Australia', *Brisbane Courier*, 10 May 1921: 7.

85 There were significant connections between the Victorian railways and national tourism in this period. Sir Howard Clapp, Chief Commissioner of the Victorian Railways was also Chairman of ANTA, while Charles Holmes had been Chairman of the Victorian Railways Development Board. ANTA's offices were in Melbourne's Flinders St station. Sinclair 2007: 24, 26.

86 'Reso Tourists', *Brisbane Courier*, 20 June 1928: 14.

87 'Reso Tourists', *Brisbane Courier*, 20 June 1928: 14.

88 Barnes 2011: 128, 144, 147.

89 Griffiths 1996: 151.



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Tourists were also treated to singing performances by children, brass band performances and sporting demonstrations: all evidence of the great strides Palm Island had taken in the civilising process. Visitors other than Resonians were also shown examples of industrious employment: 'native policemen ... beside native butchers, bakers [and] labourers'.<sup>90</sup> Accounts tended to see activities like this as 'work', or at least training for work, while corroborees were often 'displays', despite the fact that tourists paid to see 'traditional' performances and that performers 'worked' on the act to fit the expectations of tourists. Also, it was 'traditional' objects such as boomerangs that were bought by tourists, rather than loaves of bread.

Some historians have regarded the spectacle of Aboriginal people working, living and singing like whites as an example of the pervasive influence of primitivism. For instance, Lydon notes that tourists to Coranderrk at the turn of the century wanted to see the modern discipline of station life because it provided 'the frisson of seeing blacks almost (but not quite) metamorphosed into whites'.<sup>91</sup> Thom Blake has argued that positive reactions to performances of sport and brass band music by Barambah inmates did not confront or challenge racism; rather, they encouraged responses akin to those for circus freaks or performing animals, that is 'See what amazing things a savage can do'. In this way it reinforced prevailing stereotypes of Aboriginal people as savage and primitive.<sup>92</sup> It is true that many audience reactions to the spectacle of inmates being civilised revealed underlying condescending attitudes about race. The England Rugby League team were 'surprised' and 'astounded' at rugby league games and brass band performances at Palm Island.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, members of the audience at a musical concert at Cairns given by residents of the Yarrabah Anglican mission had 'narrow escapes from apoplexy when the picaninies started their nursery rhymes'.<sup>94</sup>

However, demonstrations of charitable care and Aboriginal self-reliance (in a western way) could serve to assuage Australian tourists' nagging sense of guilt about colonial treatment of Aboriginal people. By the 1920s, parts of Australian society – especially religious groups, humanitarian organisations and those with more than a passing interest in Australian history – were concerned that British colonialism and settler expansionism had treated Aboriginal people unjustly. There was also the growing feeling that the Australian nation owed a debt to Aboriginal people.<sup>95</sup> Such a debt could be paid, it seemed, through 'consolations' like the paradise of Palm Island. Employment, education and health services helped to persuade tourists that the 'right thing' was being done and the 'Aboriginal problem' was being taken care of.<sup>96</sup> Such visitors would have

90 'Palm Island, Abo's paradise', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June 1929: 11.

91 Lydon 2005: 211.

92 Blake 2001: 192.

93 'English team, visit to Palm Island, displays by Aborigines', *Brisbane Courier*, 3 July 1928: 8.

94 'Aboriginal concert', *Morning Post* (Cairns), 14 September 1905: 2.

95 Reynolds 1998: 112; 'Palm Island, treatment of natives, Dr Bancroft's view', *Brisbane Courier*, 30 July 1932: 14.

96 Rolls 2010.

been especially keen to see Palm Island as a socialist paradise. Further, bright children, caring mothers and industrious workers were ammunition against those who believed that Aboriginal people could not become 'civilised'.

Visitors to some of the non-Government Christian mission stations in Queensland – such as Yarrabah near Cairns and Mapoon in the Gulf of Carpentaria – also commented on the good care and instruction that the residents received. At Yarrabah visitors were delighted with healthy babies, clean, smiling, well-behaved children and Aboriginal dentists, carpenters and blacksmiths.<sup>97</sup> At Mapoon, visitors were 'surprised and delighted' with the quality of the children's schoolwork, and noted that this was 'a direct answer to those who hold the opinion that the Aborigines of Queensland are incapable of the higher attainments of civilisation'.<sup>98</sup> At neither mission were corroborees or war dances reported on, although they were certainly performed at Yarrabah and by Yarrabah residents at nearby towns.<sup>99</sup> Mapoon and Yarrabah were not as firmly on the tourist trail as Palm Island, and consequently attracted either those involved with Christian missionary activities, or those who sought out a reserve as a destination in itself, rather than one stop on a pleasure cruise. It is therefore, fair to assume that those visitors who noted employment and education at Palm Island had a pre-awareness of or interest in Aboriginal people and their future.

For these types of tourists, there was a future. Equipping Aboriginal people with secular education, Christian gospel and European work ethics suggested the underlying thought that they were not, in fact, a 'doomed race'. Following the logic of the 'doomed race' theory, a popular view of missions in this period was that they were places which existed simply to 'smooth the pillow of a dying race'.<sup>100</sup> However, missionaries themselves often objected to this characterisation of reserves, seeing them instead as places that would equip residents with the skills necessary to assimilate into modern life. In 1922, with newspapers around the country publicising Daisy Bates' claims that the Aborigines were headed towards 'certain and utter destruction', the Anglican *Australian Board of Missions Review* wrote a series of articles condemning such a view: 'our missions are not merely to "smooth the pillow of a dying race," but rather to supply a backward race with a power which will enable it to take its place in God's family of nations'. And less condescendingly a few years later, 'Anyone whose fetish or selfish bleat is "they are a dying race" should apply to the Superintendents of Mission Reserves for the vital statistics of their settlements; also for data regarding mental and physical and industrial ability.'<sup>101</sup>

97 'A day at Yarrabah', *ABM Review*, 12(8), 14 October 1921: 118; 'Yarrabah station, visitor's impressions', *Cairns Post*, 6 October 1922: 3.

98 Comments in the Mapoon mission visitor's book: Mr and Mrs Park, Killara, Sydney 1907 and Richard B Howard, Brisbane, 22 July 1908. These impressions bear out Atwood's observation that mission visitor's books were not objective, but usually pro-administration. Attwood 1989: 22. Nevertheless, through their boosting it is clear what visitor's *wanted* to see at missions.

99 Diary of ER Gribble, 18 March 1907, 14 August 1907, Gribble papers, Box 5, 10/11.

100 'The vanishing Aboriginal', *ABM Review* 13(3), 7 May 1922: 40.

101 'The vanishing Aboriginal', *ABM Review*, 13(3), 7 May 1922: 40; and 'Aborigines: impressions after eight years work', *ABM Review*, 16(7), 12 October 1924: 130.

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The passionate advocacy of missionaries was starting to be reflected in government rhetoric and policy too. A 1924 report to the Queensland parliament noted that it was becoming evident that Aboriginal people may not in fact be doomed to extinction. In the annual report to parliament it was noted that there were 3,505 Aboriginal people under the age of 12, 'which hardly seems to bear out the commonly expressed opinion that the aboriginal race is dying out'. This number had doubled by 1938.<sup>102</sup> In the mid 1920s it was becoming possible to imagine a future for Aboriginal people. J. W. Bleakley, the Protector for North Queensland, noted that 'Far from dying out, they have ... prospered'.<sup>103</sup> Over the course of the 1930s, as McGregor notes, Aboriginal extinction 'came to appear less and less certain'.<sup>104</sup>

The possibility that Aboriginal people may not, in fact, die out and therefore needed to be prepared for modern society, was starting to take hold more broadly. *Walkabout* magazine thought missions offered Aboriginal people one of the only 'salvations' from extinction.<sup>105</sup> Many travellers and tourists agreed with this assessment of the benefits of mission life: visitors applauded the efforts of missionaries and administrators for demonstrating to the public that Aboriginal people could be 'rescued' from savagery and civilised.<sup>106</sup> By 1951, popular writer Colin Simpson could draw on respected scientific opinion in saying that Aboriginal culture may well be ancient, but that did not make it primitive and that 'Aboriginal man' has a future which 'we, surely, will not keep from him'.<sup>107</sup>

It would seem that a significant minority of visitors to Palm Island agreed with this sentiment. They came to the reserve hoping to see evidence of good state care and attainment of the advancements of civilisation by its inmates. They were, on the whole, pleased with what they found there. Further, places like Palm Island offered evidence that Aboriginal people were not dying out; rather, were thriving and attaining skills that would equip them for modern society. In this way it provided corroborating evidence to the statistics that showed the doomed race theory was itself doomed.

## Conclusion

The example of Palm Island illustrates the widespread interest in Aboriginal culture in the inter-war period, both amongst local tourists and international visitors. It also shows the diversity of tourist responses to Aboriginal people. While the spin of the Queensland Government Tourist Bureau and some of the more florid newspaper articles gave the impression that tourists were only interested in the primitivism of Aboriginal culture, in truth it was more than this. Tourists and travellers were still influenced by the powerful ideas of racial

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102 May 1991.

103 McGregor 1997: 114.

104 McGregor 1997: 225.

105 Russell 2001: 34.

106 'Yarrabah station, visitor's impressions', *Cairns Post*, 6 October 1922: 3.

107 Simpson 1951: 178, 'Foreword'.

determinism of the early twentieth century, as their simplistic ideas about 'socialist paradises' and ancient practices indicate. However many traveller accounts did show a willingness to look beyond these clichés and to the possibility of Aboriginal agency: their sophistication in tailoring performance and exploiting a commercial transaction; their history as survivors of frontier wars; and their expertise in 'civilised' things.

Tourist responses also show the complex and sometimes contradictory ideas surrounding race in this period. On the one hand, the idea that Aboriginal people were inescapably primitive and therefore doomed to die out continued to be persuasive: particularly within a popular tourist culture that sought to exploit a kind of gloomy romantic melancholy in Aboriginal performances. On the other hand, it shows the growing realisation that Aboriginal people may not only have a future, but may have a future as a modern, 'civilised' people. The 1930s were, in the words of Tom Griffiths, 'a watershed' in Australian popular opinion about race: ideas of primitivism were entrenched among some aspects of society, yet articulately challenged by humanitarians, anthropologists and Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists.<sup>108</sup> Tourists, too, contributed to and influenced this public conversation.

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<sup>108</sup> Griffiths 1996: 83.

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