

Introduction

This edition of *Aboriginal History* has been assembled by two co-editors, Neil Andrews and Brian Egloff of the University of Canberra. Their collection of articles preserves a nice balance between historical narrative and biography on the one hand and, on the other, the theoretical interpretations which these may prompt. Readers will be impressed by both the narrative and analytical skills evident in Don Baker's examination of the Aborigines who guided the explorer Thomas Mitchell, Thom Blake's account of the removal of Aborigines to Queensland's reserves and Rosita Henry's detailed assessment of the significance of Aboriginal participation in the 1993-94 dispute over the Kuranda skyrail near Cairns. Readers interested in how biography contributes to a wider history will find much to satisfy them in Richard Broome's tracing of the life of Fred Wilson, better known as 'Mulga Fred', widely assumed to be the Aboriginal model in the 'Mine tinkit they fit' Pelaco shirt advertisements. The 'Mulga Fred' article is complemented by John Maynard's profiles of Aboriginal jockeys and Malcolm Prentis's account of an ethnographer's dealings with Aboriginal informants. Sitting between these two groups of articles is Peter Read's comparison of the sense of belonging to land articulated by many Aborigines and particular non-Aborigines. A third group of articles consists of those in which the authors consider the implications for social theory raised by the historical events they examine. In this group are Robert Castle's and Jim Hagan's discussion of the means by which settlers in Australia created an Aboriginal workforce, Rob Foster's analysis of the myths surrounding 'paper yabber' or the messages Aborigines once delivered for settlers, Patrick McConvell's examination of genealogical imagery and ideology in affirming Aborigines' attachment to the land, Gaynor McDonald's study of Wiradjuri dispossession, and Barbara Glowczewski's discussion of the Yugun and Yawuru peoples of the Kimberley.

To complement the articles, Luise Hercus has brought together a wide-ranging suite of book reviews. They are a gauge of the variety of research now typifying Aboriginal Studies, and the increasing importance of this to the broader field of Australian Studies.

Readers will soon detect the interwoven themes of Aboriginal achievement and identity underlying this volume of *Aboriginal History*. Those of my generation—or at least those who grew up in Melbourne during the 1940s—probably remember that one Aborigine more than most others shaped our understanding. This was the man in the Pelaco shirt advertisements, the subject of the cover illustration and of Richard Broome's leading article for this edition. The power of the 'Mine tinkit they fit' advertisements in influencing views about Aborigines is seen in a personal experience. In 1949, the last year Pelaco used the advertisements, I was a pupil in a Sunday School that treated its pupils to a fancy dress parade. I went along as the chap in the Pelaco ads.

How to transform me from 'white' to 'black' boy for an evening was a problem my parents solved—a concoction of burnt cork and lanolin applied to all exposed portions of my skin and hair. My family thought I looked the part, and would certainly win first prize if I shouted 'Mine tinkit they fit!' often enough. To my dismay, however, my best friend took first prize as 'Groucho Marx'. Later that evening, my parents added injury to the judges' insult by discovering that the easiest way to remove my home-made greasepaint was to scour me vigorously with a scrubbing brush dipped in eucalyptus oil. If my parents had said, 'Son, an Aboriginal identity means pain and humiliation!' I would have understood.

Like the Pelaco advertisements, images of Aborigines, favourable and unfavourable, have long been at work in Australian society, subtly impinging on our thinking in often unexpected ways. To these are added the other influences discussed in this volume—urban myths and popular stereotypes, the exploits of Aboriginal sportspeople and the subjective opinions of early ethnographers. Then there is the impact on the public consciousness of Aboriginal missions, reservations and children's homes, of Aboriginal oral traditions, the jobs to which Aborigines have often been confined, and their associations with particular regions. All have helped mould our understanding of who Aborigines are and what they have accomplished. The special contribution of this volume is to help us all, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, see this understanding in truer perspective.

In acknowledging the contributions of Neil Andrews, Brian Egloff, Luise Hercus and the individual authors of the articles and book reviews, I make special mention of the work of our typesetter, Tikka Wilson, of Richard Barwick, who processed the illustrations and cover photography, and of our business agent, Tracey Watson. They eased the burden of production and distribution, for which the Editorial Board is most grateful. Finally and in mentioning the Board, I thank its members for their guidance. Without it this volume would be the poorer. Last, but not least, I would like acknowledge the hard work of Ingereth Macfarlane who was inadvertently omitted from the list of editors of volume 21. The Editorial Board apologises to Ms Macfarlane for this omission.

Ian Howie-Willis
Managing Editor