

Black Australians Aboriginal Australians Aborigines

It is ironic that, in the 1970's, we need to introduce ourselves. Way back, before the coming of the First Fleet (1788), before even the arrival of Captain Cook (1770), and possibly just after the European world became convinced that the world was not flat, at that time long ago, the people of the then 'known' world knew that the occupants of our country were Blacks. Right into the mid 19th. century, Australia was known as a Blackfellow's Country.

In a very short space of time, however, Australia has, internationally, changed her complexion. Now it is considered almost novel to re-discover Australia's original inhabitants, and to find them Black.

The gubbah (white people) tell us that we have been here for 50,000 years, yet they find no evidence of a time when we were not here. For thousands of years we lived in this land, we practiced our religions, we watched our seasons, and were one with our Gods. We organized our social structures, defied nature's attempts to obliterate us with her floods and her droughts, and we probed the mind and the universe. We have a history and a culture that is as old as time itself.

Two long/short centuries ago, the gubbah came, in his boats, carrying his guns, and decked out in costumes most unsuitable for our climate and our terrain.

He didn't come to look, nor to quietly co-exist, he came to kill! He came to possess that which did not belong to him, nor ever shall. He came to steal our country.

A short but violent history now lies behind him on our shores. Massacres, poisoned water-holes, poisoned flour, disease, rape, murder — by these means was our country wrenched from us. Not an unfamiliar history to those knowledgeable in the ways of colonialists..

Still we survive and live to introduce ourselves. Not so many as before, but stronger than before, for we are the survivors. We have lived through the holocaust of the white man's arrival.

Disenfranchised and incarcerated until a decade ago on Reserves which the Government set aside, we have watched and grown canny in the ways of the gubbah. Where it was possible, we maintained our own traditions, practices, and religion. Where it was not possible, by virtue of the gun, we have adapted our traditions to ensure our continued survival. We speak now many languages, our own and those of the gubbah. Yet we cling to that with which we are familiar, we cling to our own known rhythms of life.

In the very centre of our country, we

continue to dance for the rain, to know the pulses with which our country throbs. We resist the gubbah's efforts to disturb our Dreaming.

Our Dreaming is the name given to that which is central to our existence.

In this certain area, we have a legend of a giant Green Ant which, if it is disturbed and let free from where it lies beneath the ground, will bring about the beginning of the end of the world. The white man has found Uranium in the site of the Green Ant Dreaming. The white man wants to set free the Green Ant.

In the cities, the struggle for our basic survival continues on a daily basis. Racism is all-pervading, and the justification for the continued assimilationist practices of the white society is elitism.

But the gubbah doesn't know that he is too new to our country. He doesn't even know the weather of our country which, unless their own skins adapt, turn black, will eat them from the outside in — with cancer. (White Australians have the highest skin cancer rate in the world.)

Meantime in the cities, we stretch ourselves to a new dance, we move with the evolution of a new image, we begin to pulse with a new energy.

We walk the streets, our faces reminding them of their guilt. We walk the hallways of their institutions of learning, and they wonder now how to make room for us, in their history books, and in their classrooms.

The guilt manifests in many ways.



Bobbi Sykes is an educator with the NSW Health Commission, a writer and one of the founders of the Black newspaper *Koori Bina* (Black Ears). An article by Ms. Sykes on *Video and Racism* appears in *City Video*, vol 1 no 3, 1977.

Vested interest, fired with guilt, flares into racist anger and violence. The gubbah is unable to recognise us, lest we become the figure of his nightmare, and claim back that which is rightfully ours — the Land.

The confused seek to patronize us. The curious seek our mysteries and our Gods. The foolish run amongst us.

Annually, but only since 1972, the Government allocates large sums of money to appease its conscience, but racism and elitism prevents them from handing the money to us. Instead, they spend it amongst themselves, telling us that they know what is best for us.

We smile. Their multi-million dollar allocations are not even paying the rent for this huge sunbright home country in which they are but tolerated tenants. We continue to wage our war for Land Rights and Land Rights Compensation. We cry out for justice — they hear our sounds, but not our words.

Our people continue to live in the slums, in shanties on the edges of their towns, suffering from the highest malnutrition and infant mortality rates of any country in this world which is not actually at war. We live in deprivation in this land of milk and honey. Reserves, and the Permit-system, still flourish in some corners of our country. The Government calls for justice in South Africa. There is nobody whose voice they can hear who calls for justice in Australia.

We live, less than half a million of us, in this country of now almost 14 million. Yet we fill their gaols, their orphanages, their welfare offices, their T.B. sanitariums, and their leprosariums. Still — they don't see us! We call ourselves the 'Invisible People'.

These films, which you are about to see, are an attempt to see us. They are an attempt, albeit almost completely a gubbah attempt, to show that we are here, and that there is more to us than meets the eye. Of course they are of the surface, we hurt too much to bare more, but they are of a surface which you have not yet seen. They tell of little of our intricacies, our dances, our conditions, and our anger. They show a people who have been prevented, for 200 years, from showing their images to the world.

No doubt in the future, we will succeed in controlling the projection of our own image, and from that position, we will be able to say who we really are.

Meanwhile, through these films, allow them to introduce us, for we are newcomers, seeking friends.

Bobbi Sykes