

Book Reviews

Reaching Back: Queensland Aboriginal people recall early days at Yarrabah Mission, edited by Judy Thompson, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989.
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In the past few years, there have been a number of books written by Aboriginal people about their own experiences. *Reaching Back*, although not written by an Aboriginal person, is a collection of such experiences.

At the centre of Judy Thompson's book is the story of Rose Colless and her family. Rose is a well-known Aboriginal woman from Cairns, who received the Australian Human Rights Medal in 1987 for her work with Aboriginal people. Through this book, Rose reaches back to her past at Yarrabah in North Queensland, to provide a lasting chronicle depicting the regime that was imposed on the indigenous people of North Queensland.

Yarrabah is an Aboriginal community that is situated on the North Queensland Coast. Once only accessible by boat, it is now approximately one hour from Cairns by road. Yarrabah was set up as an Aboriginal Church Mission in 1892 by Reverend Gribble to "protect" the remaining Aboriginal population of Queensland.

The book also includes stories from others who grew up in Yarrabah and who have since left and of those who remain there. Their stories depict the day to day life at Yarrabah and give a more detailed picture of the history of the community. *Reaching Back* is a record of Aboriginal oral history as told by Aboriginal Elders before it is lost forever. In fact, some of the people who were interviewed and whose stories appear in the book have since died. The eldest contributor in the book is Mrs May Smith, who was taken to Yarrabah from Fraser Island, in the early 1900s. The history is brought up to date by Lloyd Fourmile, the Chairman of Yarrabah Council.

Throughout the book, we are given glimpses of the injustices suffered by Aboriginal people, especially their children. Aboriginal people at Yarrabah were controlled at all levels of their lives. The control began with the removal from their home lands to the Mission, often with the assistance of the police. Children were also taken from their parents to live at Yarrabah. It is evident that the authorities gave no thought to the effects of bringing people from different clans, languages and backgrounds together and forcing them to live with each other and the original inhabitants of the area — the Kunnganji tribe. The individual stories also give the reader an insight into the rights which were denied to Aboriginal people, and which other Australians at the time took for granted, for example, freedom of movement, freedom to marry whom one wished, the right to work, and the right to one's cultural heritage and identity.

In spite of all this, it is evident from these stories that even though the people experienced a denial of basic human rights and were treated intolerably, they do not reach back in anger or bitterness. I have also listened to stories about life at Yarrabah and life in the dormitories from my mother, grandmother and aunts. While the book does not explore the difficulties that the people experienced in depth, especially the hardships endured by the children, these are stories that must be told.

More books like *Reaching Back* should be written by Aboriginal people and read by many people in our wider society so that they are informed of Australia's true history and the inhuman manner in which the indigenous people of this country, and particularly their children, have been treated by the white invaders. *Reaching Back* should be introduced into schools where it would help children from non-Aboriginal backgrounds to confront the real history of this country and gain a better awareness and understanding of Aboriginal people. *Reaching Back* is also an example of how oral history brings the past alive.

PATRICIA BOYD*

Crimes That Shocked Australia by Simon Bouda, Bantam Books, Sydney, 1991

The connections between law and popular culture are myriad and complex. Most people "know" what they know about law not from direct involvement in the legal system as plaintiff or defendant, police or accused but rather from the series of ideological messages they receive through their contact with the organs and sites of the broader, or popular, culture. We learn about the rule of law and respect for the independence of the judiciary not from reading Dicey or Walker but from the fact that we "know", for example, that the batsman must leave his crease immediately and without question when the umpire gives him out. It is at the SCG or the WACA, not the High Court in Canberra, where most Australians learn the many subtle and often disguised messages about citizenship in a Parliamentary democracy. At the same time, we learn about the criminal justice system and the hidden construction of our collective notions of crime, criminality and criminalisation not by sitting in Magistrates Court but by watching the six o'clock news and reading the newspaper on the train or bus ride to and from work. What becomes important in our social understanding of crime is not what the judge or the barristers said, but what Brian Henderson or the headline writers at the *Telegraph-Mirror* tell us they said.

I do not mean to suggest here some simplistic view of the creation of ideology at some crudely superstructural level by "them" who impose their views on "us" against our will. The real phenomenology of the creation and recreation of criminality through popular culture is much more complex than that. Indeed, it is only if we begin to understand our own active participation in this process of the social construction of crime that we can fully comprehend the magnitude and complexity of the web of social interactions which create the culture in which we are all implicated. It is the reader of the *Telegraph-Mirror* and the

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