

ABORIGINAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION PRESENTS



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by

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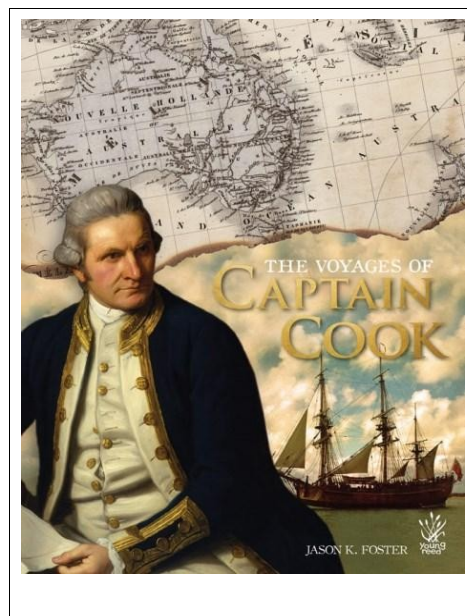
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I Think We Need to Talk About James in the K-10 National History Curriculum: A Book Review

Meet Captain Cook by Rae Murdie.
Illustrated by Chris Nixon.
2013. Random House. Australia.
28 pages (unnumbered), soft cover.
RRP: \$16.99



The Voyages of Captain Cook by Jason Foster.
2016, New Holland Publishers. Sydney.
48 pages, hard cover
\$16.75 - \$19.99



These two texts are probably the first of a number of additions to the juvenile literature on Captain Cook that will be produced in the lead-up to the 250th anniversary in 2020 of the great man's arrival on the east coast of Australia. Publishers will no doubt see schools as a lucrative market and offer new additions to the genre to both Primary and Secondary teachers of History even though Cook himself is now barely mentioned in the new K-10 National Syllabus.

In the Stage 2 Course the man once considered the starting point for modern Australian history appears to have been confined below decks, competing for hammock space with a whole crew of non British navigators like Vasco da Gama, Columbus, Magellan, Torres, Jansz, Tasman, and La Perouse and even a non European, Zheng He.

In the Stage 5 Course he is not specifically mentioned at all, apparently having been made walk the plank and consigned forever to the depths of the past by overly sensitive Syllabus writers.

Some move away from the narrow Anglo-centrism of earlier syllabuses was long overdue and will probably be welcomed by most. But inherent in this dispensing with yet another Once Great, Now Dead White Man (OGNDWM) is the danger that the unpleasant realities of the past will now be even more obscured than when these were at least on the table and up for discussion.

Indeed, the apparent dumping of this particular OGNDWM may in fact be another instance of timid Syllabus writers tilting at windmills. Another example of their foregoing an opportunity to encourage students to meaningfully explore the real nature of the relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal peoples --- the issue that should be at the core of our national history course.

The new Syllabus rightly challenges the the old furphy that Cook was the *discoverer* of Australia. But that claim has long been on shaky foundations and contested in various ways. Generations of Catholic students, for instance, had the claims of Spanish navigators drummed into them at the insistence of Cardinal Moran. And even in the godless State schools most text books ploughed laboriously through the gradual unveiling of the coastline by the non British navigators who preceded Cook.

What was ignored everywhere, however, was Cook's real significance: the fact that his arrival in Australia not only marked the effective beginning of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples but was also crucial in shaping the nature of that relationship that persists to the present day.

By ignoring the chance to explicitly define and explore this aspect of Cook the new Syllabus is ignoring an opportunity to guide a new generation of students to a better understanding of it. Moreover, in practice, most teachers will probably continue to teach Cook as they have always done, using the interpretations of the resources available to them rather than attempting to interpret the more obscure and tentative suggestions made in the Syllabus itself.

Rae Murdie's *Meet Captain Cook* (2013) will no doubt be used by some to address the Stage 2 Syllabus directive to *examine European exploration and colonisation in Australia and throughout the world up to the early 1800s*. And Jason Foster's *The Voyages of Captain Cook* (2016) will similarly be seen by Stage 5 teachers as a resource to help them *briefly outline the extent of European imperial expansion and different responses* to it.

Unfortunately the Syllabus offers no more than the faintest of hints as to how these texts could be used to address this content. And the texts themselves struggle to come to terms with new, post-colonial insights into concepts like *discovery* and *colonisation* or Cook's role in 18th and 19th Century imperialism and its subsequent impact on Aboriginal and other indigenous peoples in the Pacific.

Surprisingly, nor does either text reveal an appreciation of the changes in Australian society, Australian law, or Australian historiography since the High Court's ruling in the Mabo Case in 1992 --- nor the impact these changes have had on educational policy and curriculum.

Then again, it is not always evident that the writers of the new Syllabus are aware of these changes either.

Both *Meet Captain Cook* and *Voyages* follow the standard template for juvenile literature on Cook that has been in place since the 19th Century when patriotic and religious publishers began representing him as a paragon of civic and imperial virtue --- a role model for young people of the Victorian era to emulate in serving Queen and Empire and extending civilisation to the darkest corners of the globe.

There have always been two parts to this template --- the first applying to Cook's early life from his birth in 1728 till his enlistment in the Royal Navy in 1755; the second to his naval career till his death in Hawaii in 1779.

A story-board summary of the first part of the template is provided in the opening pages of *Meet Captain Cook* --- the story of the young boy born into humble circumstances who through education, diligence and dedication rises to become an officer in command of one of His Majesty's ships.

Despite some fantastical elements there is little inherently wrong in this idealised representation of Cook's early life. As a role model he is a much more attractive proposition than many of those ex-students regularly paraded at school assemblies because of their achievements in becoming first grade footballers; reaching the finals of *Australia's Got Talent*; or raking in obscenely high incomes through careers in merchant banking.

But the second part of the template is more insidious. For in representing his career from 1755 to his death in 1779 it invariably represents Cook as both an exemplar of the European Enlightenment and the personification of a benign British imperialism. Through these two lenses Cook is seen as a seeker of knowledge and enlightenment; the harbinger of a Pax Britannica bringing peace, law and commerce and civilisation to a previously untamed, savage world; and a friend to indigenous people everywhere

The simplistic acceptance and application of this part of the Cook template makes it difficult to use texts like these to apply post-colonial perspectives on Cook and British imperialism. Or even to develop genuine empathy with those who were colonised as a result of his *discoveries*.

The absence of post colonial perspectives in *Voyages* is evident when Cook is firmly set in the context of some European *Golden Age of Exploration* --- part of some idealistic quest dating back to ancient times --- a *race ... to find that last hidden continent*.¹ Though the possibilities of swashbuckling adventures and the making of fortunes are noted they are presented in a *Boy's Adventure* sort of way. There is no attempt to raise the possibility of links between Europe's colonial expansion and the economic imperatives of mercantilism and emerging capitalism. Nor of the possible links with the subsequent destruction of other societies, cultures and civilisations.

As a record of world history since 1492 this is sadly Euro-centric. And an even more myopic Anglo-centrism reveals itself at times.

The dismissive and remarkably ungenerous recording of the achievements of those non British navigators who preceded Cook to Australia, and whose maps and charts he himself acknowledges repeatedly in his journals, is as surprising as it is ungracious. Torres, for instance, is presented as some sort of Spanish bumbler who found Torres Strait only because he is blown off course and who *didn't realise he had found Australia ... and didn't report his find*.² Willem Janzsoon (1606), Dirk Hartog (1616) and Abel Tasman (1642), and their collective achievement in charting most of Australia's west, coast and significant stretches of the southern coast, are reported in a perfunctory manner --- almost as much significance being attributed to the obscure English mariners John Brooke (1622) and John Daniel (1681).³

This privileging of the British role in Australia's *discovery* reaches a Brexit-like dismissal of other Europeans in the English rose-coloured assessment of William Dampier (1688 and 1691). Generally Dampier has been considered nothing more than an English *buccaneer* and *privateer* with *little ability in managing the crews placed under him*, a man who was found by Court Martial to be *unfit to command any of His Majesty's ships*.⁴ In *Voyages*, however, he emerges as being a *significant navigator* who was *rather interested in science, natural history and native peoples*.⁵

This representation of Dampier segues nicely into the application in both texts of the standard representation of Cook as an idealistic and benign explorer on a quest to extend mankind's (or at least Europe's) scientific, maritime and geographical knowledge.

1 Foster, 2016; 8

2 Foster, 2016; 10

3 Foster, 2016; 11-15

4 J. Bach. 1966. *Dampier, William (1651–1715)*, Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, Canberra. Online at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dampier-william-1951/text2345>

5 Foster, 2016; 16-17

Thus both texts develop the incontestable meme of Cook living in a *time of great exploration and scientific discovery*. In *Meet Captain Cook* he accepts with *pride* his commission to *chart the transit of the planet Venus across the sun*⁶ and he *studies, plans and calculates* in preparation for it. Throughout the long voyage his crew *marvel* at the new flora and fauna, the fish and animals and plants they *observe, collect and examine*.⁷

But the equally incontestable fact that he lived at a time of great imperial and colonial rivalry and international tension is almost totally ignored. Though his secret orders are noted in both texts, they are mentioned in a way that heightens the sense of adventure rather than with any invitation to consider their possible implication in terms of the imperial rivalries and strategic interests of the Great Powers of the 18th Century.

With this Euro-centric focus there is little room in either text for Aboriginal perspectives. And the celebration of European colonisation as the progress of civilisation means there can be little consideration of its negative impacts on the indigenous peoples of the *New World* that Cook and Europe were then *discovering*.

Indigenous peoples are mentioned in both texts --- but this has been the case since juvenile literature on Cook was first published. What is surprising in these two texts is that the references to them can show less empathy and be more stereotypical than in some examples from the past.

In *Meet Captain Cook*, for instance, readers are introduced to the friendly and welcoming Tahitians, keen to trade *fresh food in exchange for beads and metal tools*. But the accompanying illustration shows the Tahitians as simple and awe-struck creatures sitting in wonder at the great man's feet while he --- clever, clothed and scientific --- conducts his observations using the latest scientific instruments.⁸

A picture tells a thousand words. And what is omitted here is any reference to the knowledge of the night skies that the Tahitians already had --- knowledge which they used to navigate the Pacific and travel as far away as New Zealand; knowledge that Cook realised and benefited from when he took Tupaia with him on his first voyage and Omai on his second.

Readers are also introduced to the *fierce Maori warriors*, a contrast to the always gentle but sometimes pilfering Tahitians. But the brutality of Cook's confrontation with them at Poverty Bay is only alluded to. Moreover any ill will is apparently quickly overcome and all problems quickly resolved for *once an understanding was reached, the crew bartered for fish, lobster and even stingray*.⁹ Another of the advantages of this benign imperialism --- the spread of commerce and trade!

Nevertheless, these sanitised references to confrontation between Cook and Maori in Murdie's Stage 2 text are much more than anything offered in *Voyages*. In this Stage 5 text Cook's 6 months in the Shaky Islands on his first voyage is reduced to a simple sentence celebrating his contribution to scientific knowledge there --- *he mapped the entirety of the coastline, realising that New Zealand had both a North and South island*.¹⁰

6 Murdie, 2013; 4th and 5th pages

7 Murdie, 2013; 21st page

8 Murdie, 2013; 14th page

9 Murdie, 2013; 18th page

10 Foster, 2016; 31

Australian readers aware of changes in Australian historiography over the past 25 years and, in particular, of the impact of the Mabo decision on an understanding of colonial history, will be even more disappointed in the portrayal of the relationship between Cook and Aboriginal people.

As has been the case in many works in this genre since the end of the 18th Century, his meetings with Aboriginal people at Botany Bay and at the Endeavour River are mentioned in both texts. But there is no attempt to explore new insights about these meetings in the light of contemporary knowledge. The use of clan and tribal names --- *the Gweagal people of the Dharawal nation* at Botany Bay and the *Guugu Yimidhirr* at Cooktown,¹¹ the only indication of any advance in knowledge in recent years.

In *Meet Captain Cook* the people of Botany Bay are surprisingly still represented only as shadows against the landscape with an accompanying statement that *the locals seemed to want them gone, but the Englishmen persisted*. This *persistence*, we learn, is expressed in how the crew *barrelled fresh water and caught more fish than all hands could eat* while Banks *observed strange animals, collected flora, and examined the soils and waterways*.¹²

All very commendable. The hard working, industrious British crew keeping the expedition viable while the gentlemen on board dedicate themselves to the collection of scientific specimens. But there is no challenge to the proprietorial presumption in this English *persistence* --- and no opportunity to explore how this may have been seen by the Aboriginal people as a rude impost on their local economy and hence a cause of tension.

In *Voyages* there is a more detailed though still very brief description of the confrontation that occurred. This is accompanied by a reproduction of the iconic 1901 Phillips Fox painting, *The Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay*, and includes a brief report of Cook ordering his men to fire at the two Aboriginal warriors who attempted to prevent the landing.

But there is no awareness of new interpretations of these events such as in Daniel Boyd's parody of the Phillips Fox painting in his 2006 work, *We Call Them Pirates Out Here*. Nor is there a hint of analysis of the possible significance of this confrontation as an initial challenge to the concept of *terra nullius*.

Instead the two men are described as being *spooked* by the gunfire and quickly frightened off. Rather than asking readers to consider their courage, their act of resistance is dismissed as pathetic and futile --- their actions no more than what *most indigenous peoples did when uninvited strangers arrived onto their land. They shouted shook their weapons and tried to show their strength. Realising the men were not leaving they went about their regular business, fishing and cooking, while keeping a close eye on the newcomers*.¹³

The dismissiveness of this account is in stark contrast to a description of the same events in a juvenile text on Cook published in 1818 by the Reverend William Bingley. This early 19th Century text showed vastly more empathy and understanding of the Aboriginal position when it described how the warriors *brandished their weapons, and though they were but two to forty, they seemed resolved to defend their coast to the utmost*.¹⁴

11 Foster 2016; 33, 35

12 Murdie, 2013, 20th and 21st pages

13 Foster, 2016; 33

14 Reverend William Bingley. *Biographical Conversations on the eminent voyages of different nations from Columbus to*

How disappointing and strange that early 21st Century texts show less understanding and empathy than early 19th Century texts. Or is this just another example of the Neo-Liberalism of the current era encouraging an ethic of Neo-Imperialism?

Significantly *Voyages* omits any specific reference to the incident at Endeavour River where, shortly before Cook and his men left after a 6 week stay repairing the ship, the local Guugu Yimidhirr people also staged a significant act of resistance.

This incident took place after the Endeavour's crew refused to share several large turtles they had caught. The Guugu Yimidhirr showed their anger at this by setting fire to the British camp. This act of defiance is of potentially more significance even than the resistance shown at Botany Bay for, it could be argued, it more clearly demonstrates the resentment of the Aboriginal people at the impact of these uninvited intruders on the local economy.

However, other than a hint in *Meeting Captain Cook* that an incident occurred that required *an uneasy truce being struck with the locals* and an accompanying illustration obliquely suggesting some tension, this second challenge to the concept of *terra nullius* is ignored in both texts.¹⁵

Will teachers have the background knowledge to explore this issue in more depth than is done in these resources? I doubt it.

Some lack of historical knowledge and a glossing over of historical detail is understandable and even excusable in childcare's literature. However, the remarkable ignorance of contemporary events shown in the omission in both texts of any reference to the High Court's 1992 decision in the Mabo Case is simply inexcusable.

This jaw-dropping ignorance is evident in the uncontested celebration in both texts of Cook's claiming possession of half the continent on behalf of King George III on Possession Island on the 22nd August 1770. This event is recorded without even a discussion question about the retrospective implications of the Mabo decision on Cook's claim. The omission of any reference to this momentous decision leaps up out of these texts as their biggest weakness.

However, these are not the only post-1992 texts on Cook to present his story (or our History) as though the Mabo Decision, and its implications for Australia's colonial history, never happened. Leonie Young's *I Wish I'd Sailed With Captain Cook* (1993); Bruce Stannard's *Aboard Endeavour: Cook's Voyage, 1768-1771* (1995); and Tania McCartney's *This Is Captain Cook* (2015) are others that simply ignore the implications of the Mabo decision --- their authors seemingly oblivious to it.

Surprisingly McCartney's 2015 text was published by the National Library of Australia. Someone in that august institution must have had some qualms about the crass superficiality of that text. For insertrf on the last page is a mealy mouthed disclaimer, as pathetic as it is shameful: *The focus of this book is the life of Captain James Cook as a mariner, father and adventurer and not the questionable outcomes for indigenous peoples.*

Pontious Pilate himself could not have expressed it better.

Cook, Comprehending distinct narratives of their personal adventures. C & J Rivington, London, 1818; 271
15 Murdie, 2013; 24-25

Despite such weaknesses there is no such thing as a *bad* resource. There is no doubt that good teachers with a knowledge of the history of contact between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people and a real appreciation of Aboriginal perspectives, will identify the Euro-centric hidden curriculum that pervades these texts.

This in turn will allow them to lead their students to new insights into the nature of history in general and of Australian history in particular. By helping their students deconstruct these texts they will lead them to a realisation that history in general, and Australian history in particular, is much more than an unquestioning recount of the *achievements* of the *winners* and a mindless chanting of the *mantra of the political, cultural and moral triumph of the west*.¹⁶

However, this task would be made much easier, and far more teachers would become engaged in it, if Syllabus writers themselves were more understanding of these issues and more explicit in their suggestions for addressing them.

There is certainly no need to drop Cook from the Syllabus or out of resources. In fact, because of his significance in initiating the ongoing relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people he must remain there in a position of prominence.

But the Syllabus needs to be more explicit in suggesting how his significance be explored.

While it may be too late to include more explicit directions in the new Syllabus now being implemented, it must be hoped that institutions like BOSTES, the Department of Education, and the Catholic and private school sectors will provide the necessary support to help teachers address the issues that have been so timidly left as obscure hints in the Syllabus.

Hopefully publishing houses, even the National Library, will also recognise the need for change. As we approach the 250th anniversary of Cook they will hopefully resist the temptation to opportunistically promote new texts in the juvenile literature on Cook that simply follow the old Victorian template.

Our students, Aboriginal and non Aboriginal, deserve better.

They need both resources and curriculum that offer them the chance to explore new insights about the man and his achievements in the context of the development of 18th and 19th Century imperialism. Only then will students begin to fully understand his impact on the contemporary relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people in Australia as well as on that between Indigenous and Non Indigenous peoples in other Pacific nations.

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16 Peter Frankopan, 2015. *The Silk Roads: a new history of the world*. Bloomsday, London; xiii

Book Review

Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art (Ian McLean, Reaction Books, London, 2016)

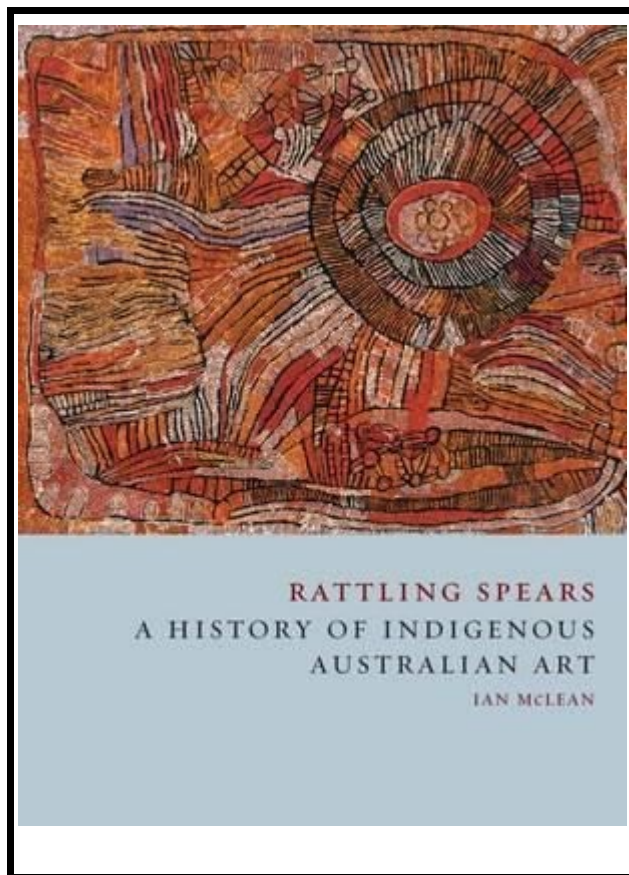
This new history of Indigenous Australian art will be a valuable addition to the professional libraries of teachers of Aboriginal Studies or, indeed of anyone interested in Aboriginal art and its impact on the cross-cultural relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal peoples.

However, it is a challenging theoretical text and its post modernist curatorial jargon makes it difficult at times to read.

Despite these weaknesses it provides an encyclopedia-like review of developments in Aboriginal art from the colonial era to the present. As well, it offers many very valuable insights into the significance of art in the historical and contemporary relationship of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people.

In particular, McLean recognises and acknowledges the importance of the visual and performing arts in providing common ground for cross-cultural communication between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal peoples. Very early in this relationship, he suggests, Aboriginal people realised that a *meeting place had to be found* and that *meeting place was the aesthetic faculty*.¹ In other words the visual and performing arts provide common ground for cross cultural communication.

It is unfortunate that this point is over-egged with some fantastical suggestions in the early chapters of the book. Such as the suggestion that the two men who resisted Cook's landing at Botany Bay in April 1770 were engaged in a sort of improvised dramatic performance – *a deliberate theatre ... a performance and a point of exchange*. Or that the near fatal attack on Phillip at Manly in the Spring of 1790 was also some sort of *remarkable contact corroboree or a transcultural ritual* organised and *choreographed* by Bennelong.² These incidents are far more important than planks in a post modernist art theory --- they were in fact acts of defiance that undermine the whole notion of *terra nullius*



1 McLean, 2016; 33

2 McLean, 2016; 32, 40-41

Nevertheless, like the late Inga Clendinnen in her history of initial contact *Dancing With Strangers*,³ McLean works from this basic realisation that the visual and performing arts were the preferred medium of communication in Aboriginal culture rather than the written word that non-Aboriginal cultures prefer. A wider acceptance of this would improve our understanding of the historical relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

More specifically *Rattling Spears* also provides invaluable detail on Aboriginal artists and their work from the colonial era to the present.

In a short review like this there are too many to mention individually but the chapter on the colonial period is a good example. It details the life and work of artists like William Barak (c1824-1903); Tommy McRae (c1835-1901) and Mickey of Ulladulla (also known as Mickey Flynn⁴; c1820-1891). It also touches on the anonymous Queensland Aboriginal artist identified as *Oscar* and the tragic Charlie Flannigan. (also known as Charlie McManus – c1865-1893). Understandably the chapter lacks the detail that Andrew Sayers could include in his excellent 1994 book on this era⁵ but it is a valuable introduction and interested teachers and students will find that additional information on all these artists and their work is increasingly accessible.⁶

These late colonial Aboriginal artists are increasingly gaining the attention of art historians. As well as McLean and Sayers their significance has been noted by prominent Australian art historians Carol Cooper and Daniel Thomas.⁷ And, even more recently by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, an Austrian-Australian art historian who works in British and German academic institutions on the expression of *alternate histories through texts and performances*.⁸

However, though contemporary art historians have moved on from the largely anthropological interests of early commentators on Aboriginal art like the ethnologists Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen,⁹ their theorising sometimes still appears a little esoteric and specialised. Indeed

3 *Dancing With Strangers*, Text Publishing Melbourne, 2003

4 Smith, 2008

5 Andrew Sayers, *Aboriginal Artists of the 19th Century*, Oxford University Press, Australia

6 Additional information on all these artists is easily accessible on-line. Entries on Barak, McRae and Mickey of Ulladulla are accessible at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/>; the National Museum of Australia has a detailed entry on *Oscar* and his sketchbook at <http://www.nma.gov.au/collections/highlights/oscars-sketchbook>; and information on Charlie Flannigan can be accessed on the South Australian Museum site at <http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/aa263/AA%20263-01.htm> and from the Queensland Historical Atlas at <http://www.qhatlas.com.au/category/keywords/aboriginals>

7 See Cooper, in Sayers, 1994; 91 and 109. See Thomas, Daniel. 2006. *Aboriginal Art: Who Was Interested* --- an address given to a Symposium, *New Visions: Histories of Art in Australia*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Mabo Day, Saturday 3rd June 2006. accessible online at: <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/daniel-thomas-document.pdf>

8 See Von Zinnenburg Carroll, Khadija. 2014 *Art in the Time of Colony*. Routledge. Oxford. Also, 2014 *The Presence of Absence: Tommy McRae and Judy Watson in Australia: the imaginary grandstand at the Royal Academy in London*. *World Art*, 4:2, pages 209-235

9 Von Zinnenburg Carroll suggests that the *early art histories* of Spencer and Gillen *inquired into the rhythm expressed in 'primitive' art, the aesthetics of magic, the purpose of ritual ornamentation or the motivation and struggle against material* (2014b; 227). See also

at times they bring to mind Medieval theologians enthusiastically debating how many angels would fit on a pinhead and whether there would be any difference if some of them were Archangels.

McLean, for instance, assesses the collective work of the late 19th Century Aboriginal artists as providing *the first substantial Indigenous perspectives on modernity*¹⁰ He reaches this conclusion after discussing their work, as most other art historians do, in terms of what it reveals about developments in aesthetics, materials, tools, methodology etc.

This is as it may be, but their work is also extremely valuable as historic text. As the late Aboriginal artist Lin Onus (1948-1996) wrote: *Aboriginal people are passionately interested in recovering their history ... and through their art these artists (of the late colonial period) speak to us through the years and tell us of their lives and the events that shaped them. That is as it should be.*¹¹ Perhaps it is up to national historians --- and teachers and students in their classrooms --- to recognise this and use this art also as historic text.

The most valuable part of McLean's book is its second half where he reviews developments through the 20th Century and into the first decades of the 21st Century. In doing so he recognises that there are many diverse and often transcultural influences on the development of the contemporary Aboriginal art movement. And he raises many important issues, often venturing into unexplored areas and opening up areas of possible investigation for teachers and their students.

For instance, in his summary of the importance of Albert Namatjira he refers to the significance of *an iconoclastic struggle at the (Hermansburg) mission over pictures*.¹² This could be a useful starting point for a study of the history of the Lutheran mission at Hermansburg, indeed of missions anywhere. For it opens up one of the dilemmas of *transculturalism* --- the enormous difficulty in balancing positive cultural exchange against cultural destruction once set in motion by colonisation.

Another instance of McLean's attention to detail and his opening up of new areas of investigation are his comments on the importance of the remarkable but little acknowledged Bill Onus (1906-1968). Like many born at Cumeragunga in the early 20th Century, Onus was politically aware and active as a result of being involved in both the Aboriginal political movement that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s; and through his involvement with the trade union movement and the Communist Party.¹³

¹⁰ McLean, 2016; 52

¹¹ Lin Onus, *Foreword* in Sayers, 1994; ix-x.

¹² Anyone wishing to follow up the history of Hermansburg might begin with T.G.H Strehlow's *Journey to Horeshoe Bend*, Rigby, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1969

¹³ In his work with the APA Onus earned the reputation of being *an uncompromising radical* though he is now less well known than other activists of that era such as (Sir) Doug Nicholls, Jack Patten, and Margaret Tucker. See Horner 1974.

Like Barak and McRae at the end of the 19th Century, Onus also got involved in producing art as a commercial enterprise when, in 1952, he established a business called Aboriginal Enterprises at Belgrave, not far from the old Coranderrk Mission on the outskirts of Melbourne. The art work he produced was certainly not *fine art* or *high art* and is easily dismissed as *popular art* or even as *kitsch*.

But, as McLean points out, and once again like Barak and McRae, Onus saw his art as a way to *influence public opinion*.¹⁴ Moreover, he also saw it as a way to *foster a pan-Aboriginal identity*. As his son Lin Onus suggested, the kitschy, popular art he produced and fostered, though *widely perceived as the traditional enemy of fine art, managed to keep the threads of a few ancient tradition intact*.¹⁵ This remarkable man, Bill Onus, is certainly worthy of a biographical study in his own right. Hopefully some teachers reading this text might be inspired to encourage their students to undertake that task.

Another example of McLean's ability to recognise the many diverse and complex influences on the development of the contemporary Aboriginal art movement is found in his discussion of the Papunya Tula movement. Thus he acknowledges the role of Geoffrey Bardon, the school teacher at Papunya in the early 1970s often credited with beginning this movement. But he does not overstate Bardon's role pointing out that he was only in Papunya for 18 months and that there were already three schools of art in the settlement when Bardon arrived.

Moreover, he details the importance of the Aboriginal artists who worked with Bardon ---- men like Kaapa Tjampitjinpa (1926-1989); Billy Stockman Tjapaljarri (b.c.1927); Johnny Warrangkula (1922-2001) Mick Tjapaltjarri (1927-1998); and Long Jack Tjakamarra (b.1932). If all that teachers gain from this book is the ability to direct their students to research on these people then the money spent in its purchase will be well worth it.

McLean also clearly realises that the inspiration for historical developments of the importance of the contemporary Aboriginal art movement are often related to the spirit of the times as much as they are to the work of individuals.

Thus he suggests that the radical new art work of Rover Thomas in the 1970s was partly a result of the artist's genius and partly a result of his life experiences. But it was probably also a result of *the scent of freedom and change* that Thomas and other artists of his generation became aware of in the 1970s. Not only did some of these artists now begin living together in the same communities as the big cattle stations either closed down or changed their mode of operations. But they were also very much aware of the changed relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people that the Whitlam era ushered in:

4

Tucker 1977. *Lousy Little Sixpence. Women of the Sun*, Episode 3

14 McLean, 2016; 73

15 Lin Onus cited by McLean, 2016; 73

*The volatile politics of land rights and social justice, the forging of education and health systems, as well as housing and economic development, raised hope of new opportunities that Indigenous people were keen to seize.*¹⁶

Though many of these hopes remain unfulfilled they undoubtedly gave considerable stimulus to the development of an Aboriginal art industry in remote Australia.

In the final sections of the book McLean provides an encyclopedia like review of Aboriginal artists and their work over the past 25 years. He examines development in both remote and urban communities and the work of both female and male artists. Some like Rover Thomas and Emily Kngwarreye are widely recognised in Australia. Others like Kitty Kantilla and John Mawurndjul less so --- perhaps unjustifiably.

Kantilla, for instance is described by McLean as *the artist's artist*. And, as for John Mawurndjul, McLean notes that *few Australian artists have had such a stellar career*. It says something about contemporary Australia that this *stellar career* is probably more recognised overseas than locally --- Mawurndjul has for instance had solo exhibitions at the Museum Tinguely in Basel and *was commissioned to decorate the highly visible ceiling and large central pillar of the bookshop at the Musee du quai Branly in Paris*¹⁷

Then again, how many people would realise, as McLean points out, that by the end of the 1990s Tracy Moffatt and the late Gordon Bennett (1955-2014) were *not just the most significant urban Indigenous artists but the most significant contemporary Australian artists of the 1990s* with Moffatt the nation's *most successful artist on the international scene*.¹⁸

Such insights about the significance of Aboriginal artists make the book invaluable. But of even more value is its highlighting of some of the key issues that have accompanied the renaissance of Aboriginal art since the 1970s. These include the tensions involved in commercialisation of Aboriginal art and the material benefits that this brought to Aboriginal communities, and the representation of secret and sacred aspects of culture.

McLean also touches on such issues as authenticity and over-supply which arose at the time of the Global Financial Crisis but perhaps the most interesting issue he raises is the constrictions imposed on Aboriginal artists if they are pigeon-holed into identity art. McLean notes that both Moffatt and Bennett were very much aware of this constraint and both consciously attempted *to distance their art from the Indigenous brand and its identity discourse both denied they made Indigenous Art and refused to have their work exhibited in Indigenous art exhibitions or illustrated in books solely on Indigenous art*.¹⁹

16 McLean, 2016; 173

17 McLean; 2016; 186

18 McLean, 2016; 222-223

19 McLean, 2016; 224

Their stance on this issue brings to mind the recent local controversy over the views of the author Lionel Shriver. Both Bennett and Moffatt appear to be of the view that to constrain an artist on the basis of their ethnicity is unnecessarily restrictive.

McLean finishes his book with a review of the emergence of a new wave of young Aboriginal artists that many of us are yet to become fully aware of. Their work is so varied that McLean regards them as *less a movement than a mix of singular artists in the contemporary art scene*.²⁰ This younger generation of *Indigenous* Australian artists include Brook Andrew (b.1970); Darren Siwes (b. 1968); Danie Mellor (b.1971); Michael Cook (b.1968); Daniel Boyd (b.1982); Vernon Ah Kee (b.1961) and Christian Thompson (b.1978).

Naturally issues of identity and the place of Aboriginal history are features of their work. But they are increasingly difficult to pigeon-hole.

At times some follow the practice of Bennett, Moffatt and others in delving into and appropriating the colonial archive of settlers and colonisers and using its visual (and print) records as stimulus to their own work --- *in order, Andrew says, to give visibility to the disappeared*.²¹ The historical parodies of Boyd in works like *We Call Them Pirates Out Here* and the challenging Aboriginal perspective on Australian history that Cook presents in his *Civilise* series come quickly to mind in this respect. Other's have been influenced by the remarkable Richard Bell's view of much of his art as *liberation art* rather than *urban Aboriginal art*.²²

Naturally the full extent and nature of the impact of this new generations of Aboriginal artists is yet to be seen. McLean, however, has done a great service in introducing them to us.

This book will not be out of place in the senior Art section of school libraries. It is also well worth adding to the professional libraries of everyone involved in teaching Aboriginal Studies or Australian History. At less than \$50 it is extremely good value in terms of professional development. Despite the challenges of its language and theory those who persist with it will unearth many gems not just about the history of Indigenous art, but also about the nations history.

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October 2016

20 McLean, 2016; 231

21 McLean, 2016; 231

22 McLean; 2016; 237

Boys and Girls, This Is Now Your Land

an introduction to the 1938 NSW School Magazine and its shaping of attitudes towards Aboriginal people

The NSW School Magazine is the oldest literary magazine in Australia and has played an important role in the education of the children of that state since it was first published in 1916. The 1938 edition provides numerous examples of the way in which schools, by unselfconsciously promoting the ideological preoccupations of the times, helped shape attitudes towards Aboriginal people.

The Magazine was published monthly from February to December during the school year with the 4 parts of each issue targeting a particular class in the mid to upper primary years.:

- Part I for 3rd Class;
- Part II for 4th Class;
- Part III for 5th Class;
- Part IV for 6th Class;

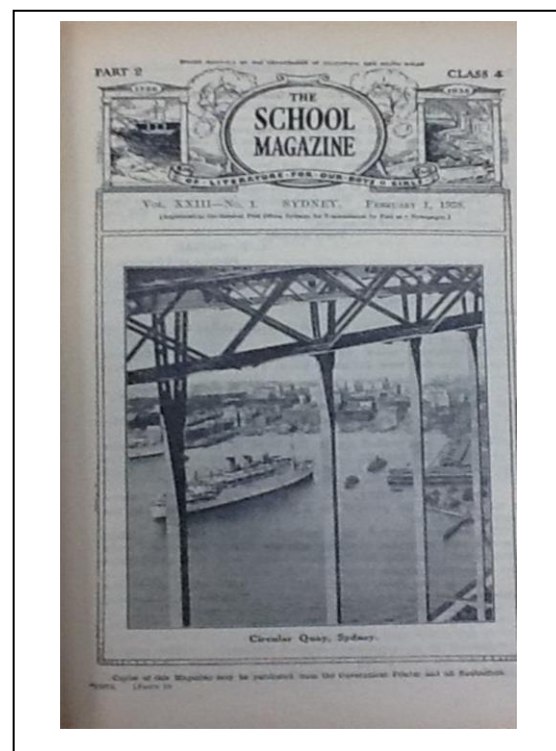
The first issue of each year always coincided with the return to school after the long Summer break. The first issue for 1938 therefore arrived in schools only a couple of weeks after the first *Day of Mourning* had been staged on Australia Day.



First Day of Mourning 26th January 1938

Not surprisingly the first issue of 1938 focused attention on the sesquicentennial of the arrival of the First Fleet and this remained a primary focus in the remaining 10 issues of that year when the country, and particularly NSW celebrated, the 150th anniversary of British settlement in Australia. Indeed, this theme was immediately established by the cover illustrations on all four parts of the February edition.

The covers of Parts I and II more or less created a *Then and Now* picture for the students of 3rd and 4th Class to contemplate. Thus, the cover of Part I was illustrated with a reproduction of a John Alcott painting¹, *The Discovery of the Site of Sydney, 22nd January 1788* --- a representation of the arrival of Phillip and several other officers on the shores of what Phillip named Sydney Cove and which would come to be known as Circular Quay.²



¹ The painting was also used for a 1938 stamp. Alcott (1888-1973) was born in Britain and migrated to Australia as a 21 year old in 1909. He gained a local reputation as an artist in the 1920s with a series of oil paintings of early colonial life.

² Apart from Phillip the officers included who included Hunter, Collins, Johnston and Mr Keltie, chief navigator on the Sirius. They had set out from Botany Bay that morning because, despite the glowing descriptions of Cook and Banks, they had immediately realized Botany Bay was unsuitable for a settlement



John Alcott's painting was also used in a 1938 stamp

The British officers appear confidently proprietorial --- all somehow still meticulously dressed despite having spent the morning beating their way up the coast from Botany Bay in three small cutters and against a north easterly wind. And they already seem quite surprisingly at home, Alcott situating them in a country which already looks remarkably like England.

By way of contrast the illustration on the cover of Part II of that February edition showed a view of the very same site but from the opposite perspective -- a photograph of Circular Quay as it then was taken from behind the Harbour Bridge that had opened just six years earlier.

What an opportunity was here for the perceptive teacher to lead her students to an understanding of the achievements of British settlement in Australia? And, in case the opportunity was foregone by any careless teacher, the Director of Education delivered a more prosaic message on the inside covers of both Parts:

**THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA.
Message of the Director to Girls and Boys.**

Dear Girls and Boys,
During one hundred and fifty years, our country has grown from a small settlement on the shores of Port Jackson to a nation of six and a half million people spread over the continent. This has been possible because men and women, girls and boys, have faced danger and difficulty, and have worked unselfishly and hopefully.

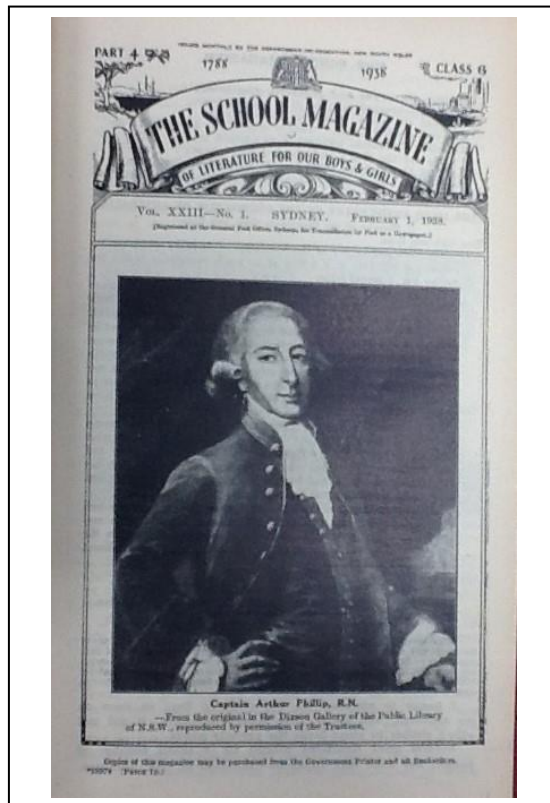
Today, if the people of the past could speak to you, they would say, *"This is now your land. Work hard and cheerfully. Be glad you have such a country. Try to make it a better and happier place."* Will you each answer, *"I shall do my best."*

Yours sincerely,
G.R. Thomas,
Director of Education.

The Director was intending, of course, to provide an inspiring, uplifting message that would instil in the children a sense of pride in their nation's history and its achievement.

Today, in 2018, our understanding of colonial history has hopefully developed so that the Director's 1938 message and the cover illustrations of the February issue are now noteworthy only for their unquestioning acceptance of the settler version of history. And as an illustration of that era's blithe acceptance of settler privilege and entitlement while apparently oblivious to any Aboriginal involvement in the history of the previous 150 years or the impact that that history had had on their culture and way of life.

The cover pictures and opening messages of Parts III and IV of that February issue adopted a slightly different approach but were also intended as celebration of the arrival of British civilization in Australia



Another John Alcott painting, *Australia's First flagship, H.M.S. Sirius*, was used on the cover of Part III for the 5th Class students; and on the Part IV cover the children of Year 6 were provided with a portrait, provided by the Dixon Library, of a wise looking, reflecting Governor Phillip himself. The Director of Education's stirring message was not reproduced for these older children, Instead poetry was used to reinforce the messages intended in the cover illustrations.

For the 5th Class children the image of the *Sirius, Australia's First Flagship*, under full sail was reinforced through a verse from a George C Whitney poem. Whitney (1842-1915) was a British writer of illustrated juvenile literature, including poetry, and this is an example of the Imperial Literature for Children popular from the mid 19th to the mid 20th Century.

Typical of this genre, Whitney's poem suggest the romance and adventure of Empire and shows no interest at all in the impact of colonization on indigenous peoples. Typically also in this example, the beginning of a new colonial adventure that the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney heralded, is accompanied by more than a hint of the fabulous and uncomplicated, treasure with which such adventure and daring was rewarded:

*Drifting like some lost ship into the night
 Goes that brave day, so many days alone,
 When first our skies of gold and azure shone
 Upon the sails of Phillip, stirring sight ---
 The fleet, that burst of sea-birds, flashing white
 Between the cliffs, whose bold grey bastion
 Opened before them, leading on and on,
 Unto that little cove of jeweled light.*

The cover illustration of Governor Phillip on Part IV for 6th Class is accompanied on the following page by a laudatory verse on the Governor from a poem by Sydney Elliott Napier (1870-1940). Napier had been born in Sydney and began writing poetry while serving in France. His verse suggests great admiration for Phillip as the founder of the nation:

*Phillip, the grave and generous gentleman,
 Great-hearted captain of a motley crew,
 Into the calm, encircled waters drew
 His sea-scarr'd ships. There where the streamlet ran,
 To meet the sands beneath a bracken' fan,
 He set the flag; and there a city grew;
 And there, from wilted seed, perchance, but true,
 To its great type, our nationhood begins.*

Napier's poem presents what was then, and is still now, the conventional view of Phillip as the nation's founding father. There is still little investigation of the ambivalent nature of his policies on the local Aboriginal people. His friendship with Bennelong is romanticized; the ruthlessness of some of his orders understated or ignored; and his reports laying the blame for what happened to Aboriginal people on the least powerful people in the colony, the convicts, are accepted as fact without challenge. Thomas Keneally's *A Commonwealth of Thieves: The Improbable Birth of Australia*³ is a recent example of this standard assessment of the man --- and Keneally is a wonderful writer of fiction.

³ Thomas Keneally, *A Commonwealth of Thieves: The Improbable Birth of Australia*. Nan A. Talese, 2005. Anchor; 2007

Napier's poem is not quite in the same literary class as Keneally. Nevertheless, when published in the Magazine in 1938 it provided, despite a somewhat unconventional rhyming pattern, an opportunity for teachers to develop their students' vocabularies and understanding of poetic form. Not to mention a celebratory sense of national history and settler achievement untrammelled by any hint of colonial injustice --- though that "*wilted seed*" may have raised a snigger or two among some of the more knowing 6th Class children.

In articles to follow, I hope to further outline the way in which the School Magazine reinforced the underlying mid 20th Century ideological justifications of imperialism --- even at that late stage just before the winds of change began battering at, and then undermining, all those European Empires that had controlled and exploited so much of the world since the 17th Century.

Today we are so much more aware of this than we were in 1938 --- and no doubt that greater knowledge informs the way in which we teach Aboriginal Studies, History, Literature and Art.

But does it really?

The celebrations of the coming 250th anniversary of the arrival of Cook at Botany Bay are already being planned. And if the reaction of Prime Minister Turnbull and others to the discourse on colonial history that took place around the Cook statue in Hyde Park last year are any guide, some of those celebrations may well invoke Neo Colonial interpretations of our past.

How will schools and teachers react to that?

Hopefully this article and the ones I plan to follow will help initiate thought and discussion about that

Dr Paddy Cavanagh,
Katoomba. July 2018.