

## **'The Great Australian Silence.'**

*Nevertheless, what is also truly a blight is the unjust fate of the original Australians who have been in this southern land for tens of thousands of years and who are yet to be really afforded their equal place in modern Australia after having first had to face genocide and territorial loss for over a century if not more when the English began their invasion in 1788 and while there have been some improvements in recent decades which have often had to be hard fought Aboriginal Australia is still being refused the necessary political avenues to fully self-determine its future for the better as the failure of The Voice referendum in 2023 has shown. Which also brings to mind when a friend asked me to accompany him to do some pamphlet letterbox dropping in western Sydney. However, I did not find it an encouraging experience as the mostly migrant community out there was not fully aware of the significance of the referendum for indigenous peoples and could well understand if they chose to be cautious and voted No not that they would be against more rights for Aboriginal communities in Australia but more so because they would hesitate to vote yes to a major constitutional change which they did not understand. (Of course I am going on a few hours of anecdotal interactions along with projecting my experiences as a teacher who all up have worked in Western Sydney for a few years where many people where in the particular area that we were letterboxing there was a large proportion of people mainly preoccupied in establishing their own lives in a new country. It would perhaps be useful to see what post-referendum polling says on the make up of people and seats that voted in the negative of which there were also many Australians who have been here for generations also voted No. Yet as a teacher on this day I could not help but think that many Australians have not been informed of the full scale of the devastation that had befallen Aboriginal society since 1788 and which along with a raised profile of Aboriginal culture in recent decades it may be presumed by many Australians that the many wrongs that have been committed towards Aboriginal peoples are now being corrected and perhaps then did not dwell that on a political rather than cultural level the Voice was still a necessary step towards still much needed restoration of Aboriginal rights. One can see on social media to the lead up to the Voice the virulent racism that still exists in Australia but at the moment I wish to focus on how ignorance rather than prejudice (which of course also go hand-in-hand) affected the referendum outcome. In the Welcome To Country of Jonathan Jones catalogue to his exhibition at Artspace titled: Jonathan Jones. Transcription of Country. Dec. 2023-Feb 2024.*

<http://www.artspace.org.au/exhibitions/jonathan-jones-untitled-transcriptions-of-country>

*The Aboriginal elder who wrote the Welcome To Country for the catalogue of this exhibition ( I do not mention his name as am not certain if it is appropriate for me to do so) who mentions the many 'new Australians' who came to Sydney after the Second World War with whom he worked with on the railways and with whom he felt there was a shared affinity between himself and those who came from a war torn Europe in regards to being racially affronted so that 'wogs, dagos, balts' had an inkling of what Aboriginal people had to negatively deal with from White Australia. Yet, in an ever expanding city with its ever changing demographics ongoing everyday contact between Aboriginal people and the wider Australian community outside say the well known suburban enclave of inner-city Redfern are now not so apparent. It is remarked with some certainty that the migrant newcomers to Australia would have also voted in favour in the 1967 Referendum yet it may have not been such a sure thing in the 2023 one where knowledge of Aboriginal society and what happened to it is filtered through an education system that while it does mention some negative aspects of the past (e.g. Stolen Generations) that came with the European takeover of this whole continent there is yet to be a full acknowledgement of the wholesale massacres that occurred with reached genocidal*

*proportions and that assimilation only occurred as a stealthy genetic version of genocide when wanton mass murder had not finished off the Aboriginal race. In recent years the genocide and frontier wars have received greater attention but perusing through a school curriculum the full magnitude of the slaughter that went on is yet to be fully taught. The number 60,000 for the number of Aboriginals killed in Queensland alone is only coming to the light in recent times which is a similar number as Australian troops killed in the Great War. As many war memorials testify we are aware of the immense intergenerational trauma caused by such massive losses (I once read highest per capita of any nation in WWI) on the Australian population so there would have been a similar devastating effect on Aboriginal society and only to be further compounded by land dispossession, the stealing of children, ongoing mistreatment including rape and slavery and as well the rounding up different surviving tribes onto 'gulag reservations'. A few links to what occurred:*

## Videos

*'The Great Australian Silence' impacts what we are taught about our history | The Point | NITV*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8s6KYmFu608>

*How the Frontier Wars Shaped Australia | Studio 10*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHxhpBNLGSQ>

The above video is an interview with film maker Rachel Perkins who did the documentary series *The Australian Wars* which deals with the frontier wars and in Australia should be found on SBS's streaming service SBS ON DEMAND. (Anyhow try there first and there are educational resources for teachers).

## Articles.

*The Great Australian Silence.* Australian Museum. (2021).

<https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/healing-nations/the-great-australian-silence/>

*Friday essay: the 'great Australian silence' 50 years on.* Anna Clark. The Conversation. (2018).

<https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-the-great-australian-silence-50-years-on-100737>

*William Edward Hanley Stanner.* Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Edward\\_Hanley\\_Stanner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Edward_Hanley_Stanner)

*The killing times: the massacres of Aboriginal people Australia must confront.* Lorena Allam. Nick Evershed. Guardian. (2019).

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/mar/04/the-killing-times-the-massacres-of-aboriginal-people-australia-must-confront>

*As the toll of Australia's frontier brutality keeps climbing, truth telling is long overdue.* Paul Daley. Guardian. (2019).

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/mar/04/as-the-toll-of-australias-frontier-brutality-keeps-climbing-truth-telling-is-long-overdue>

*Frontier Wars. Deadly Story.*

[https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/history/Frontier\\_wars](https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/history/Frontier_wars)

*While this article below mentions that in 2023 in the NSW Syllabus there will be mention of the Frontier Wars. Despite this shift in the right direction it is an aspect of white settlement history that should have been integrated into the school curriculum at least a couple of generations ago if not earlier.*

*Updated NSW syllabuses to include Indigenous perspectives . SBS News. (NITV Education. August 2023)*  
<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/updated-nsw-syllabuses-to-include-indigenous-perspectives/o5jz4z5au>

*It is also worthwhile pointing out that white explorer history which opened up the country beyond the first coastal settlements would not have been possible without Aboriginal trackers who knew the best ways to go inland – after all, Aboriginal tribes had been doing so for thousands of years – who are still to gain sufficient recognition; a point that is actually made in the following link:*

*NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. Submission: Review of NSW Curriculum.*

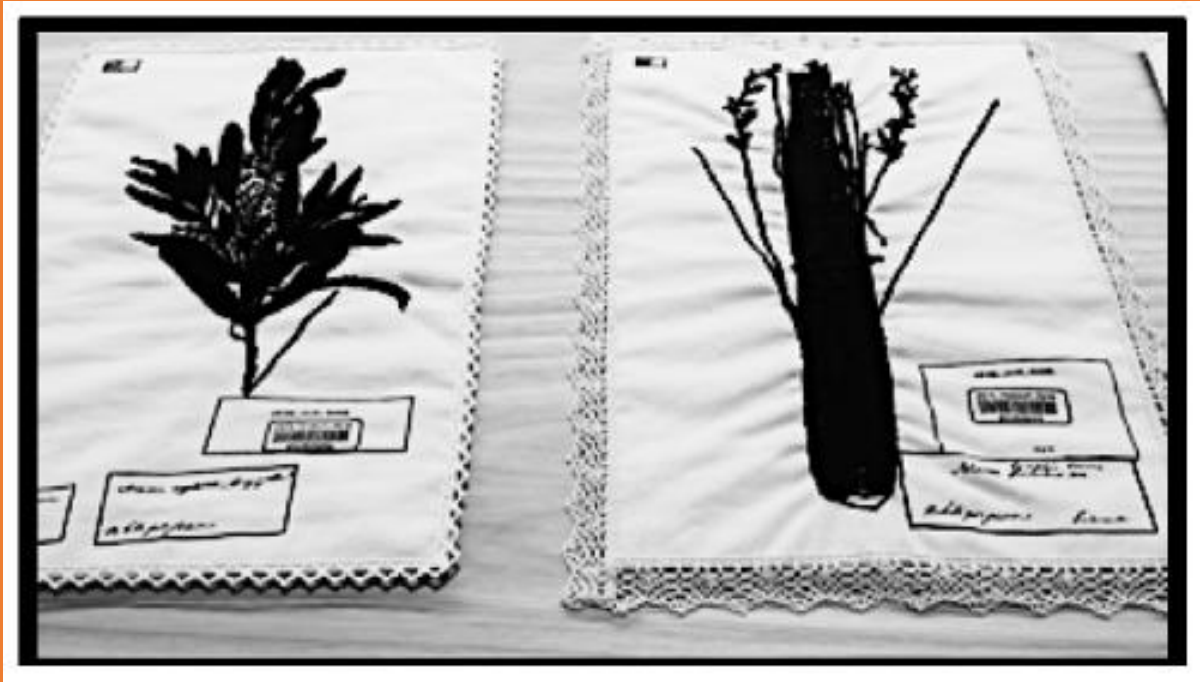
<https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/NSW-AECG-Submission-NSW-Curriculum-Review-FINAL.pdf>

*While it is valuable that students are respectfully taught about Aboriginal culture there does need to be an equal emphasis in also educating students about Aboriginal perspectives of 'living on country' as well as looking at modern Australian history from an Aboriginal point of view and which also includes the Frontier Wars etc.*

*Yet in regards to the Johnathan Jones exhibition which examines the relatively unknown French expedition to Australia when Napoleon was in power there is on display hundreds of embroideries based on the native plants that were collected.*



Many of these embroideries (although not all) were done in collaboration with women from western Sydney mostly of Afghan, Indian and Korean background (I am going from the notes in the catalogue so apologies if there are other nationalities) along with many other independent embroiders to produce what can be seen placed on the long wooden display shelves in the photos. I went to a panel discussion whereby some of the women spoke about how they gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of the original peoples of this vast continent and one sensed that the transmission of such knowledge along with the effects of colonization upon them is an example of how such cultural interaction can be utilized as a way of bringing together Australians (whether they be migrants or locally born) with Aboriginal peoples so as to both breakdown barriers as well as create relationships (the women also spoke of meeting various elders from Aboriginal communities) and what was learnt here and the processes involved could be utilized on a wider educational scale so as to overcome the cultural – and political - alienation that occurs.



*Johnathan Jones on telling all the stories.* Ocula Magazine. Dec. 2023.  
<https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/jonathan-jones-on-telling-all-the-stories/>

The exhibition catalogue: *Johnathan Jones. untitled. (transcription of country).* 2023. If not available at a bookshop as far as I know it can be purchased at Artspace. Woolloomooloo. Sydney. <http://www.artspace.org.au> Probably best to try here first as it is an 'in-house' publication.



First photo: *Black Deaths in Custody March.* Eveleigh Street. Redfern. Sydney. circa 1980s. Second photo: *Jimmy Little & Neil Murray.* Victoria Park. Broadway. Sydney. Mid. 2000s. Third photo: *Ruby Hunter & Archie Roach.* Survival Day Concert. La Perouse. Sydney. circa early 1990s.

*Human rights report slams Australia's 'systemic discrimination' of Indigenous peoples.* National Indigenous Times. (January 2024)

<https://nit.com.au/13-01-2024/9293/human-rights-report-slams-australias-systemic-discrimination-of-indigenous-peoples>

*Bek-Jean Stewart - I Heard Bobbi Sykes Driving In My Car* + [+Language warning.](#)

<https://youtu.be/h2CwtjNtLWs?si=6RpPGHSvQwWduys7>

*Neil Murray singing about Myall Creek* Maritime Museum Forecourt. Sydney (2014).

[https://youtu.be/i97rgH-EK5I?si=fp\\_Cs9O3U6guOx2y](https://youtu.be/i97rgH-EK5I?si=fp_Cs9O3U6guOx2y)

*Band at the Block for Black Anzacs March.* Redfern. 2013.

<https://youtu.be/wv0gj3xUqQI?si=p-CfS5QrTyNj0L27>

*BLACK ANZACS Anzac Day March.* 2013. (April 25). Redfern. Sydney.

[https://youtu.be/OVE9iln\\_diM?si=CHCgeDwsRuA9rTLm](https://youtu.be/OVE9iln_diM?si=CHCgeDwsRuA9rTLm)

*Coloured Diggers Anzac Day March Redfern Sydney April 25 2015.*

<https://youtu.be/SYlAuK3E7ZQ?si=QXMCQcG-KJ8h-wLm>

*REMEMBERING EDDIE MURRAY. JUNE 12. 2021. SYDNEY TOWN HALL.*

<https://youtu.be/APtHfYFmtGk?si=WJG8ouCnd6T8AzZQ>

*JUST ANOTHER DAY IN THE COLONY. SYDNEY TOWN HALL. SORRY DAY RALLY MAY 26 2021.*<sup>+</sup>

<https://youtu.be/k-QM1vgj9cw?si=EeXwyf9DkuSA-KP9>

<sup>+</sup>Note there is some language in this heart-felt, powerful speech (of whom the speaker is I do not know) which some viewers may find offensive.

*Aunty Shirl. Aboriginal Deaths In Custody.* Sydney Town Hall. April 10. 2021.

<https://youtu.be/E1e5MTqYXi0?si=St3u1HfgOO8Ssn4W>