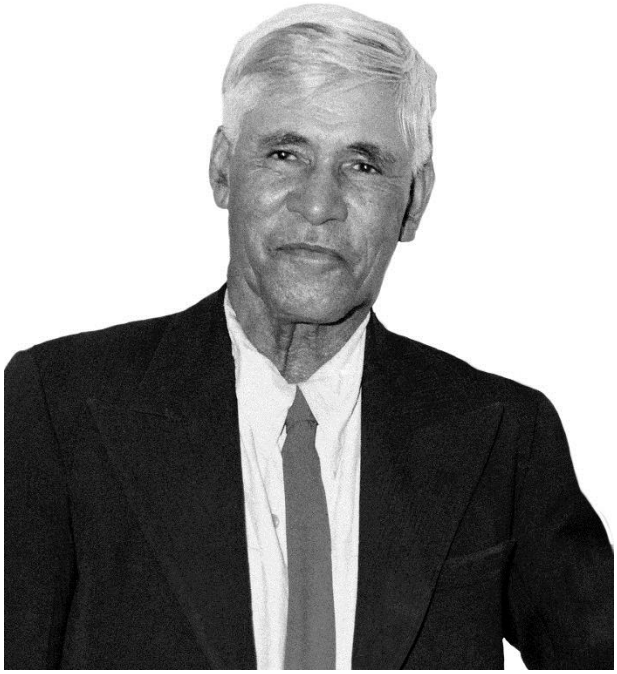
The Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture Series



1995 Lecture Notes

Australia's Fourth World Nation

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Oorala Aboriginal Centre

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Australia's Fourth World Nation

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Good evening Deputy Chancellor, Mr and Mrs Peter Pardy, Mr Reuben Kelly (Dhan-gadi) Elder of clans, Vice-Chancellor, Professor and Mrs Thom, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor John and Mrs Sharpham, sisters and brothers, distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen.

I wish to sincerely thank the University of New England's Union for inviting me to present this most prestigious Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture. I also extend thanks to the Aboriginal clans of this region, the Gumbaynggir, Nganyaywana and Dhan-gadi for allowing me to enter their country. I am honoured and humbled. Mr Frank Archibald exemplifies many of the qualities of my late father, whose christian name was Archibald.

It was my father's persecution as an outspoken Birragubba man, that has given me the incentive to continue speaking out for justice and human rights. Dad was removed as a half-caste child from the community of Ayr, North Queensland, and sent to Palm Island under the Protection Act. One week before he died he was visited by Birragubba elders, where they conversed in fluent language. When asked why he did not teach his children the language he replied, "I have too many wounds from the beatings we received when speaking our language".

In 1957, my grandfather was one of the six men who went on a hunger strike on Palm Island for better conditions. All six men were handcuffed, chained and separated again from their families and sent to others reserves in Queensland. My grandmother is still alive today, with these memories.

1995 is the year of celebrating Victory in the Pacific; a time when all Australians remember, and pay homage to the many thousands who fought for freedom. We remember those who paid with the greatest gift of all, their lives.

Many indigenous people enlisted in, fought and died in wars when governments refused to recognise them as citizens of this country, their country, Australia.

The aftermath of war is tragic, many thousands if not millions of lives will never be the same again. Unfortunately, here today there exists the aftermath of an unknown war, a silent secret battle of dominance, persecution, intolerance and death.

Australia's indigenous population remains the legacy of this war. Today the indigenous nation is a living and dying reality. Indigenous Australia has the highest adult mortality rate in the world per head of population.

Before I proceed providing what may be seen as offensive, or impossible to believe about appalling acts toward other humans beings, I will give a brief overview of my background.

Jam the third eldest of 18 children, my mother is in her late 60s and is still living, with a strong spirit and 13 children, 56 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren. Her parents both deceased, a Kalkadoon father and mother a South Sea Islander.

Our family, like many indigenous families, was extremely poor. I recall going to school in my early years and asking my school teacher what the word "condemned" meant. She asked, "Why do you want to know that?" I replied, "There is a big sign on the front of our home that has this spelling."

My previous home to this was a tin shack with a dirt floor and no electricity. It seemed okay for us to live like that, seeing our mother struggling to clothe and feed us, as we thought this was how everyone in the world lived. I burnt wood every week and kept charcoal to use on sheets of tin for my homework. My brothers gave me a gift from the city dump, an old iron typewriter, they regularly visited this place to collect copper wire and bottles to sell.

I was not doing very well at school, which had predominantly white students, all white teachers, and definitely a western curriculum. When I reached fourth grade, I began to experience a shift in my education when a new teacher, who was one of the first Aborigines to graduate with a degree in Queensland, was appointed at my school. This was in 1959, and it was not until the referendum in 1967 that we, as Aboriginal people, were legally able to be educated, counted on the census, and permitted to move freely within our own country.

The indigenous students were not encouraged to take on academic pursuits in school. Sports were our greatest achievements, always winning trophies and prestigious awards for our western schools. When I reflect on those years, not much has changed in terms of the western system respecting, encouraging and supporting my people within the confines of education.

This newly-appointed Aboriginal teacher was extremely political and commented:

> You Aboriginal kids are popular at your school for your ability to achieve in sports. But sport is not going to give you a job. You need to concentrate more on education. You kids have to do better than whites. I know, because I have lived under the "Protection Act" and racism is a fact of life.

The Aboriginal Protection Act was an act of Parliament which placed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people under the protection of the government. Governments had total control over the everyday existence of our lives. Control over where we lived, where we worked, what we earned, what we ate, even the heart rending forced removal of our children from their parents.

An extract from the acclaimed book, The Wailing,[1] a National Black Oral History:

> My sisters were taken to the home at Cootamundra. I wasn't there when they were taken, I was in hospital. They came into the hospital to take me too, but the matron had told my aunty to take me home. That was the kind of animals they were. That's the kind of thing Aboriginals had to put up with. They treated us like animals. We found my poor mother lying down, just off the road, under a tree. She was in a bad way, I didn't know what was wrong with my mother. Why was she crying?

Many Aboriginal people today are the living legacy of these repressive, inhuman laws; they are striving to find their roots, their identity, their people. There are so many issues that impact on our everyday lives that it is impossible to remain focused on the one issue without focusing on others.

I, as an indigenous woman, must provide this information. Not to provide this information is to sanction the continuation of an untrue history of indigenous Australia.

I acknowledged this proud dedicated Aboriginal teacher's advice and studied the three R's regularly. I became a champion of the Whiz Kids television program at the age of 12. As I became a role model for my family, I believe I also inspired many young poor, oppressed indigenous friends.

In the following years of primary school, I became very skilled in academia, setting a vision and goals which many of my peers thought were only dreams to keep our sanity, from the racism and oppression that we all encountered in our daily living. After receiving excellent marks in junior high, I applied for many secretarial positions in my town in 1966, the year before citizenship. I was given these positions verbally, however, when I identified as an Aborigine no job positions were given. I took the next option and turned to nursing, where I completed my general and postgraduate certificates. My nursing career encouraged me to travel around the country and the globe, where I met many people from different walks of life.

It is through these interactions that the meaning of equitable education crystallised.

> Until our culture is recognised for its richness, uniqueness and complexity, and given the recognition by education authorities, we will always have to live with the derogatory stereotype that lowers the self esteem of our children and causes them to feel that the education system has no relevance to them whatsoever.[2]

That is a very laconic history of my life, now an enlightening unknown history.

Today there exists a living vacuum, perhaps a premeditated blanket cast over a history to perpetuate the belief that settlement of this land was honourable and without unbelievable suffering, torture, mutilations and death.

A black history has been etched within living memory, through our process of oral history. The chronicle of this silent battle is also well documented throughout European occupation. This sanctioned comatose headache will not be stirred by governments, organisations and individuals. There exists condoned selected memory loss, an anaesthetised conscience that has not, will not or cannot come to terms with a violent claim to our lands.

Presently the world media is emitting a harsh glow, focusing on the French nuclear tests in the South Pacific. The world is witness to the French Government's arrogance and storm trooper tactics, justifying their right to test nuclear weapons.

The right to experimental testing cannot be condoned when the aftermath is contamination and genetic destruction of future generations. While attending the 1992 World Uranium Hearing, in Salzburg, Austria, I heard a South Pacific mother state:

> The French have been testing atom bombs in our country for many years, both in the sea and on land. We eat the traditional foods from the earth and sea every day. I gave birth in the last five years to a "Jelly baby", that is a baby with no skin. Many of our sisters have given birth to similar babies and the government claims we had German Measles in the first three months of pregnancy. They also say that there is no proof that these gross deformities are from the nuclear fallout, yet we never had abnormal births before the bomb tests.[3]

From 1952-1957 the British tested bombs in central Australia on Aboriginal land, commonly known as "Maralinga". These bombs were 20 times greater than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. An Aboriginal elder, Mr Yami Lester, is a living testimony of these tests, where his last sighting was the big mushroom—then he went blind.

There has been little national, and indeed international focus on these horrific events endorsed and supported by the governments of the time. The tremendous increase in cancer-related deaths and deformed infants, once again reinforces the total lack of conscience of the colonial mentality.

Confrontation of two diverse cultures was inevitable, to declare that a war existed would be to refute a peaceful settlement by Europeans.

> Declaring war would mean recognising Aborigines as an invaded people rather than, as they were legally defined, "British Subject", whose resistance against the British system of law became logically a "Criminal Act" and the resisters, automatically, "outlaws". On the other hand, undeclared war, if pursued cautiously, was largely unpublicized war, and conflict could be effected without regard to wars' conventions: the treatment of prisoners, the signing of treaties, the making of territorial settlements, indemnities and like.[4]
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> Under this guise of an undeclared war Aborigines became expendable. Every man, woman and child became a target to the white man's gun. This justifiable homicide was defended by the Aboriginal resistance to "guerrilla warfare" tactics. This method of resistance provided images of Aborigines as treacherous, bloodthirsty savages, unworthy of trust and feeling having "no compunction on committing murder".
>
> Every white man (on the gold fields) carrying a rifle tries its range on every black fellow he sees.[5]
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> Another occasion, I was travelling on a road where for more than a quarter of a mile, the air was tainted with the putrefaction of corpses, which lay all along the ridges, just as they had fallen. It is true that the offence here was the murder of five shepherds, on one station, in a week, but such wholesale and indiscriminate vengeance seems rather disproportionate, to say the least.[6]

Professor Henry Reynolds, an historian at James Cook University, Dr Rae Sumner, a lecturer at the Queensland Institute of Technology's School of Language and Literacy Education, and research by the British television documentary, Darwin's Body Snatchers, indicates some of the greatest names in British science were involved in a body-snatching trade of huge proportions. Between 5000 and 10 000 Aborigines had their graves desecrated, their bodies disinterred and parts dismembered.

Charles Darwin is also implicated through letters written in the 1870s and found in a Hobart archive in the mid 1970s.

> More disturbing is the evidence that Aborigines were murdered for the body parts trade. A deathbed memoir written by Korah H Wills—gold-rush immigrant who became mayor of Bowen in Queensland and a candidate for the colonial parliament—found five years ago in a Surrey attic, contains a confession about the killing of an Aborigine who was later dissected for display.[7]

Further evidence of cultural genocide is provided by prehistorian scriptwriter Rhys Jones, cited in Harris, S (1979).

> One's gorge rises at this sorry tale of psychopathic sadism, of punitive parties and concentration camps, of the Sunday afternoon manhunts, of sexual mutilation, of cutting flesh off living bodies and feeding it to dogs, of burying a baby up to its neck in sand and kicking its head off in front of its mother, of tying the severed head of a husband around the neck of a raped spouse.[8]

Sadly negative perceptions of Australia's indigenous peoples still remain today, but known by other names: Christianity, education, assimilation, integration and segregation, validating to the Europeans their various forms of cultural genocide.

In 1987 the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act was passed, the first measure of separate "legal" control over Aborigines. This legislation empowered the Government to forcibly move Aborigines onto reserves and keep them there.

The missions and reserves established after this legislation that were passed are as follows:

1904	Barambah (Cherbourg)	Government
1904	Aurukun	Presbyterian
1904	Mitchell River	Anglican
1911	Taroom	Government
1914	Mornington Island	Presbyterian
1914	Hull River	Government
1919	Palm Island	Government
1924	Lockhart River	Anglican
1927	Woorabinda	Government
1931	Doomadgee	Christian Brethren
1939	Edward River	Anglican
1946	Foleyvale	Government
1949	Hopevale	Lutheran

There was a marked increase in forced removals after the 1934 amendment to the Act giving power over more half-caste Aborigines.

In Queensland as in many parts of Australia, Aborigines were now at the mercy of government. Our everyday existence was then controlled—our employment, our housing, our education, our children.

> It's not a pretty sight to see. My cousin, she had six or seven kiddies, she lived in Hugo Street, and the Aboriginal Welfare Board came after her kiddies and they were running. As soon as they said 'The Welfare's after you, Jean, they want your kid', she grabbed them... The fear. I think it was back in the Forties. The police were with them and I seen my cousins were running, like scared rabbits. They'd go in the house and they went under the bed and into cupboards, and the police car screaming for their mother.[1]

Those not removed to reserves were left to survive as fringe dwellers on the perimeters of regional towns. Living, surviving and dying off the leftovers and scraps from these centres.

This portrayal of intolerance begins to paint a picture of how and why there exists within Australia a fourth world nation. Aborigines are seeking equity. To seek equity is to seek justice. If justice is to become a reality in the present and be a part of the future, we cannot pretend that the past did not exist.

A just present can only be built upon an understood past, and it has to be acknowledged by the Australian society, that the past has been marked by acute racial tension, racial hatred, racial violence and racial injustice.

Dr Paul Wilson has analysed the homicide and serious assault statistics for Queensland over the three-year period 1978-1981. He found that the homicide rate per year across 17 Aboriginal communities was 39.6 per 100 000 compared with an annual rate for the State of Queensland of 3.28 per 100 000. The rate for serious assault charges on reserves was 226.05 per 100 000 compared with a State figure of 43.85 per 100 000.[9]

This is mirrored throughout every social indicator:

- massive decline in population from approximately three million to 300 000 (over 207 years). We are now 1.6 per cent of the national population;
- an average life expectancy for indigenous people being 20 years less than other Australians;
- infant mortality is three times higher than other Australians; it was six times greater. However, our babies' birth weights have not changed in 20 years;
- Aboriginal and Tones Strait Islanders represent approximately 15 per cent of the prison population and are 20 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Aborigines;
- Aboriginal and Tones Strait Islanders are over-represented in correctional institutions. Our children are at least five times more likely to be in non-government residential care than non-Aboriginal children and a higher proportion are still to be found in government institutions.

Many Aboriginal communities lack the basics, such as proper housing, clean running water, sanitation, nutritional foods, sealed roads and air strips.

A study in 1988 of life expectancy between Maori, American Indians, Canadian Indians and Australia's indigenous population, found indigenous Australians had the lowest life expectancy. '°

Race	**Male**	**Female**
Maori	65	74.1
US Indian	67.7	74.1
Canadian Indian	63	74.1
Indigenous Australian	54	61.5

A recent study has now declared indigenous Australia fourth world standard compared to that of developing countries of third world standard. These figures remain an indictment on a country that is regarded as a first world nation.

Dr Ian Ring, an epidemiologist in the Queensland Department of Health, quotes:

> What are we doing about Australian Aboriginal and Tones Strait Islander health? We are not even at the stage the Americans were up to 40 years ago.
>
> At present health in Australia is a 3 tiered approach: 1. If you are non-Indigenous you receive good quality, high standard health care; 2. If you were to be born an Australian Aboriginal or Tones Strait Islander on average, you receive inadequate health care, have some diseases that third world countries have eradicated; 3. Indigenous health programs are tacked onto the end of mainstream programs, which policy makers say they are doing something for the Indigenous population's health. In theory it looks fine, but in practice, it is not happening.'°

The western arrogance and ignorance not to embrace a culture whose harmonious existence nurtured a co-existence with the land, its habitat and its people, remains a puzzle to me and many of my people.

Unfortunately today there endures a mentality of superiority: "we are right and you are wrong". Conform or remain a fringe participant, an insulated society within this land of Australia. For far too long we have been relegated to the perimeters of consultation, participation and implementation. This is reflected in all statistics available including:

- employment;
- health;
- imprisonment;
- mortality rates;
- housing; and
- education.

Although the participation rates of indigenous people in the education system and, in particular, the Higher Education sector have increased significantly over the past decade. Centres like Kumbari/Ngurpai Lag and the many Aboriginal and Tones Strait Islander centres throughout the country still experience annual attrition rates in the vicinity of 40 to 50 per cent.

For many indigenous people, their experience with mainstream educational institutions have been negative, due in part to the denigration of Aboriginal culture and inaccurate accounts of history taught in the schools. This, combined with prejudice and racism, has led to a mistrust of educational institutions by many indigenous people.

Lower participation and completion rates for indigenous students have been identified across all sectors of the education spectrum (DEET, 1994).[11]

Educational institutions generally have been reluctant to commit funding and resources to the development of Aboriginal education initiatives. This position is directly opposed to the recommendation of the National Aboriginal Education Policy (NAEP) and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) reports which seek to increase the inclusiveness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in educational decision making processes.

Equity from the viewpoint of Australia's indigenous peoples entails more than access; it entails the introduction of proactive programs and policies which recognise and respond to Aboriginal and Tones Strait Island culture and perspectives. Indeed, it has taken nine years for my own educational institution to finally introduce one Indigenous Studies unit incorporating an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective into its curriculum. Yet, back in 1981, the following recommendations were made in a report of the World Council of Churches:

- that state and federal governments involve Aborigines more fully in the formulation and implementation of policies on Aboriginal education;
- that state governments involve Aborigines in curriculum formation and introduce Aboriginal culture and languages into school curricula;
- that state Departments of Education develop curricula that more adequately prepare children for life in a multi-cultural society. Departments of Education should seek to eliminate all racist bias in the interpretation of history and to encourage greater understanding of the culture of Aboriginal people;

- that state and federal governments adequately fund Aboriginal initiated schools and programs for the teaching of Aboriginal culture and tradition.

Today, 14 years down the track, some of these recommendations are only slowly being implemented.

To encourage the trust and confidence of Aboriginal and Tones Strait Islander communities, it is contended that measures to promote greater Indigenous involvement and self-determination in educational decision-making, including the identification of needs, funding, curriculum, program design and implementation, are required.

Similarly, it is necessary to increase indigenous staffing at all levels in all education systems including primary, secondary, TAFE, colleges and tertiary institutions with a permanent career structure and equitable working conditions.

For example, many primary and secondary schools have employed indigenous education workers through the National Aboriginal Education Policy. However, most of them have been working for over a decade with a unique role in unacceptable working conditions. These workers, alongside indigenous teachers, are the excellent role models for our children. Without these workers, the schools would have very little communication with indigenous students.

Many people have natural capacities to be helpful because of their fortunate or unfortunate life experiences. A person without the usual credentials sometimes is regarded as a threat to those with certificates and degrees in providing culturally appropriate support mechanisms. Such non-professionals, often called para-professionals or "indigenous non-professionals", are widely used in service delivery in all kinds of agencies.

It is here I wish to pay my deep gratitude to my eldest sister, Dorothy, who has been an indigenous education worker for 16 years, and also to her husband Sam. Both have cared for my children while I have studied and maintained a solid written education. Dorothy has also sacrificed her own education in assisting my mother with raising my siblings.

In the eyes of the western academic world my qualifications are irrefutable. However in my Aboriginal culture, these qualifications carry little weight within my family structure. My cultural upbringing endorses a protocol of family respect. Academic achievements do not encroach on these values. My eldest sister Dorothy, is the backbone and is a tower of strength to us all and is held in high esteem as the eldest.

Dr Lawrence M Brammer of the University of Washington,[12] stresses, the importance of para-professionals and clearly defines the important roles they play to professionals in all fields of society.

In spite of everything, progress is being made, as my appointment to a senior academic level at the University of Southern Queensland, evidences. Even though I have had to acquire western academic credentials in order to be accepted, I now have the opportunity to significantly challenge and influence that same conservative and basically colonialist, arena. The impact that I am able to have, along with other indigenous Australians in positions similar to mine, will at last provide the opportunity for the voice of indigenous Australia to be heard and acknowledged with the respect I advocated earlier.

Already at the University of Southern Queensland there is evidence that this beginning to happen. Some faculties are approaching my Centre, independently, with requests for assistance in developing materials, units, even whole programs, which reflect and respect indigenous

perspectives. Four months after my appointment to my current position, I have been invited to seek appointment to the Academic Board of the University. This alone points to a major shift in focus by my institution. The point is that in spite of this progress, indigenous Australians must continue to fight for the acknowledgment and respect that many other Australians take for granted.

Until mainstream society and state and federal governments recognise the need for positive change with culturally appropriate learning and teaching styles, indigenous students will remain disadvantaged members of the community.

If any person, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, encounters barriers in their quest for an education, their road to equality within today's society will be a difficult road to travel. To begin life as an indigenous Australian is to begin an educational life flawed with intolerance, ignorance and racism.

My vision for the future, is an educational system where cultural diversity is cherished and respected, where social justice is a central theme, where indigenous perspectives are incorporated throughout the curriculum, where a true and accurate account of history is taught and respected. Where adequately funded proactive programs are established to redress the 207 years that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were systematically excluded or placed on the fringes of society and the educational system. When this occurs, education will be equitable for all.

In closing a quote from a black African woman in 1934,

> When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important, whether I am afraid.[13]

Thank You.

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