HISTORY OF ABORIGINALITY AND GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

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1. HISTORY OF ABORIGINALITY AND GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

1.1 GENERAL HISTORY OF ABORIGINALITY

To provide an overview of traditional Aboriginal life in Western Australia, even in summary would be an extensive task and certainly beyond to scope of this particular document. Hence, the following section will provide a sketchy overview of Aboriginal history and evolvement prior to and following White Settlement. An extensive references list has also been provided to supplement this information and is located at the end of this document.

1.1.1 Aboriginal Identity prior to White Settlement

There is no doubt that the full saga of the first discovery and colonisation of Australia, which dates from at least 40 000 years ago, will never be accurately known. Mulvaney (1975) and Flood (1989) provide comprehensive accounts of Australia prehistory and Mulvaney and White (1987) should be consulted for summaries of Australian prehistory and reconstructions of Aboriginal societies at the time of first European settlement in 1788. Radio-carbon dating of human remains and charcoal finds suggest that the Aboriginals have been in Australia for more than 50 000 years and it may in future be found to be anything up to 120 000 years (see Tonkinson 1978 for details). In 1788 when the Europeans arrived, there were approximately 300 000 Aboriginals living in Australia, divided into over 500 tribes, each with their own distinctive territory, history, dialect and culture. Thus there were over 500 variations on the single Aboriginal theme.

A broad generalisation - Prior to European involvement all Aboriginal communities were semi-nomadic hunters and gathers which meant that each tribe foraged for food across its own divided territory. This might be as vast as 100,000 square kilometres in the desert regions or as small as 500 square kilometres in fertile coastal areas (Broome 1982). It was not an aimless search but one directed by an intimate knowledge of the land and the seasons. Aboriginal communities continually changed and perfected their hunter-gather lifestyle. Group and kinship systems were woven into the fabric of religious and economic life and expressed through mythology, ritual practices and patterns of relationship and obligation. The economic and the sacred represented central domains of power which was most clearly divided by gender. The basic economic unit was the domestic unit which clearly defined the roles of Aboriginal men and women. The men were skilled hunters, trackers and stalkers for large game and marine creatures. Aided by their digging sticks and bush skills, the women were proficient in gathering various fruits, vegetables, small animals or seeds for bread making. Even the children collected fruits and small game. Each member of the family made their contribution to the families and community's food and thus men, women and children were partners in ensuring survival (Broome, 1982).

The Aboriginal people's deep love for their local territory was reflected in their spirituality. Their profoundly spiritual world view rests on a complex set of beliefs and behaviours commonly referred to as the Dreaming, or Dreamtime, which is typically described as the period of creation (see Stanner 1958). As recognised by the

Berndts (various references) and Tonkinson (1970, 1974, 1978) in their anthropological field research of numerous Western Australian located Aboriginal groups, the Dreaming heritage was shared and understood through the media of myths, rituals, songlines, features of the landscape and portable object of many kinds (eg stoves, spears and carvings etc). The Dreaming can be described as many things in one, a kind of narrative of things that once happened; a kind of log/diary of things that still happen; and a kind of principle of order transcending everything significant for Aboriginal people (Stanner, 1958 as cited in Edwards, 1987). It incorporates human beings within the timeless world of myth and sacredness; and it places them firmly within their own social context and makes it possible for people within the community to fulfil their everyday needs. The Dreaming seems to constitute a particular view of life, of the place of human beings within a pre-ordained scheme or patterning symbolising a three-sided relationship between mythic beings, nature and people (Berndt, 1979). Each is believed to be dependent on the others. People were part of nature, part of particular mythic beings, in social and personal terms.

Sacred roles, responsibilities and powers were most often enacted by initiated men. The ultimate guardians of the Law were older men who demonstrated their social responsibility through their knowledge of ritual. The rites of passage via birth, marriage, initiation and death, were considered to be the major social transitions in male life (Mol, 1982). Anthropological literature from the 1930s to 1950s reported that Aboriginal women were deemed to be of lesser cultural importance than men. However, articles by Catherine Berndt (1950) and others (eg. Bell, 1981, 1982, 1983; Gale, 1974; White, 1975) suggested that women had a separate and secret ritual life. Bell (1987) argues that the rituals of women emphasise their role as nurturers of people, land and relationships. She adds that their responsibilities are mainly to maintain harmoniously this complex relationship between the living and the land. This relationship is manifest in the intertwining of the ritual focal points of health and emotional management. The women's wide-raging and broadly based concept of nuturance is speculated to be modelled on the Dreamtime experience. That is, through rituals women establish contact with the past, make manifest its meaning and thereby shape their worlds. The past is encapsulated in the present; the present permeates the past (for further information see Bell, 1987). Under the Law men and women have distinctive roles to play, ceremonies may be classified as those staged by women which are secret and closed to men; those in which men and women participate; and those staged by men which are closed and secret to women.

In sum, it would appear that traditional Aboriginal life involved a complex interaction of social, physical (as human beings and part of the land) economic, sacred and mythical roles. The information above has only briefly described these elements and their roles within traditional Aboriginal ways of living. Aboriginal cultures, in the face of pre-contact ecological transformations, have had to adapt to unexpected social and ecological change brought about by the settlement of English and European people in Australia.

1.1.2. The First Settlement

On 26 January 1788 British ships containing seamen, soldiers, official and convicts sailed into Port Jackson, to confront the Gamaraigal people of the Sydney area. In

the succeeding years white settler invasion infiltrated throughout most of the coastal and inner areas of Australia. Although European explorers such as Dampier had been passing along the coast of Western Australia for over 200 years, it was not until the first English settlements were begun in the 1820's and 1830's that European Aboriginal contact became significant (Howard, 1980). The coming of "White settlers" altered the traditional picture drastically to what Elkin (1951, 1954) calls a process of "dispossession and de-population of the Aborigines". By the early 1930's this population had decreased to less than 30 000.

Articles written and edited by anthropologists RM and CM Berndt [specifically, "The World of the first Australian" (1977) and numerous chapters of "Aboriginals of the West: Their past and present" (1988)] provide comprehensive information on the impact of "White settlements" on traditional Aboriginal life in Western Australia. These articles should be consulted for detailed information.

In brief, the introduction of numerous diseases, the overwhelming amount of violence towards Aboriginal people and the desire to control and conquer account for the declining population of Aboriginal people. With this decline in population came the change in Aboriginal people identity, ways of living (spiritually, socially, economically etc), perceptions and expectations. Aboriginal elders whose authority was derived from the realms of the sacred, confronted superior "White" technology and inevitably crumbled. There was also change in the location of Aboriginal communities as White Settlers continued to conquer and take control of the land. Aboriginal people were forced to move from traditional and familiar lands to the outskirts of towns or stations and missions owned and managed by White Settlers. In conjunction with genocide, Government settlements, missions, pastoral stations, mining establishments and pearling fleets all inevitably contributed to the social-cultural alterations for Aboriginal people.

For Aboriginal people who survived the initial confrontations and those who arrived later, there were limited avenues for adaptation. The predictability and ordering of life as it had been known was in turmoil and the traditional means to power and respectability were undermined. As a result, Aboriginal people were relegated to dependant and mostly subservient positions. Born (1970) suggested four models of adaption to rapid social change including retreatism, reconciliation, innovation and withdrawal and the literature suggests that Aboriginal people were resolved to reconciliation. That is, Aborigines appeared to move into a variety of structured relationships with White Settlers who retained control and dictated the forms of adaption possible for Aboriginal people. Station life provided perhaps the most powerful transitional identity, as Aboriginal people remained close to their traditional land. These people also frequently came from a common descent group and were able to maintain a seasonal return to a traditional lifestyle during the wet when station work ceased. In comparison, missions generally provided only external and frequently authoritarian structure. They tended to concentrate on groups from diverse land regions with consequent inter-group rivalry and conflict. Traditional lifestyle and related religious beliefs were discouraged and there were fewer means to build or enhance self-esteem through valued activity. The benefits of mission lifestyle were mainly protection and food for which Aboriginal people had to demonstrate compliance to mission routine.

In addition to Aboriginal people on missions and stations, there were those who had grown up in the bush and a fringe dwelling population which later increased dramatically (Hunter, 1993). Those people who remained in the bush clearly maintained a strong and enduring traditional identity. Conversely, fringe-dwellers frequently experienced the attempts of White Australian's to obtain control and other disruptions to their lives (eg. access to alcohol) which resulted in difficulties in maintaining traditional links.

The White Settlements also resulted in social and familial changes which seemed more evident on stations than missions. That is, Aboriginal women were brought into the homestead and some ended in relationships with the White Settlers. Thus, grew a population of mixed descent of Aboriginal children. This was regarded with alarm by the White Australians. This is best summarised by Robinson (1973) who described the situation regarding the 'half-caste' population in Derby in the 1950s and 1960s as:

> "Part-Aboriginal people consider themselves to be culturally sophisticated in relation to the 'bush-people' of the Reserves. Many of them have Citizenship Rights and drink at the town's two hotels, while Reserve people have to acquire their liquour surreptitiously, and drink it away from European observation. A few people of part-Aboriginal descent may even deny their Aboriginal background and attempt to 'pass' in European society. Most are disinterested in traditional life, or in the attitude of part-Aborigines, the 'yellow fellows'. They are 'rubbish people' whom they see caught between two cultures. An old Bunaba many from Fitzroy Vrossing summed up the Aboriginal view of part part-Aborigines: "White-fellows have go a country. Black-fellows have got a country. Coloured people have no country. They just come from a jack donkey and a good mare" (pp.214)

Government policies regarding children of mixed descent developed. These policies related that as part-White Australians they could not stay with Aboriginal people: as part-Aboriginal they were denied the rights accorded to Europeans. Thus mixed descent children were removed from across the region to be reared in missions - many of whom never or decades later met their parents. This removal of children from parents was not solely restricted to mixed descent children, in all mission settings and many stations White Australians claimed responsibility over Aboriginal children. Aboriginal children were thus introduced to institutional-type living and schooling which created a new form of discipline for children and their families to learn to adjust to and live with (for an example of the impacts of children's removal see Tonkinson (1982) who describes the Jigalong Kimberely experience). As a consequent to these attempts to 'co-exist', adaptation policies emerged and their nature varied for mission and station settings but the underlying themes seemed similar - "assimilate...live like white Australians" (Stone, 1974 as cited by Markus 1994) or be left behind.

1.1.3   Assimilation and Integration

The shift in policy towards assimilation was stated at meetings of commonwealth and state officials in 1948 and 1951. The expectation was that "all persons of Aboriginal

blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like white Australians do" (Stone, 1974 as cited by Markus, 1994). It seemed that the task of governments was to promote policies that would allow Aboriginal people to be merged into and be received as full members of the wider community.

Slowly following the Second World War, gaining momentum during the 1960s and most profoundly felt since the 1970s, the most important change impacting on the construction of identity was the withdrawal of the legislations, force, overt, imposed controls over Aboriginal peoples lives. However, covert control via economic dependence remained evident (Hunter, 1993). As stated by Kolig (1987) *"In this time of Aboriginal 'self-determination', advisers no longer gave orders to be obeyed by the Aboriginal clientele. Power has to be wielded more subtly and surreptitiously, by careful engineering and exploiting existing social trends, rifts, power struggles and dynamics within a community so as to bring about the desired results, rather than by blunt superimposition of will"* (p.103).

One of the changes brought about by the "assimilation' policy was that pensions were made available to the aged, infirm and to women with children. Guidelines for eligibility usually focused on women with children living in a settled situation (with or without a male). A consequent of this change in economic dependence was gender role confusion and as Collmann (1988) suggests *"conditions under which women acquire welfare benefits . . . encourages them to minimise their relationship with men"* (p. 105). At the same time that access to reliable funds became available, Aboriginal men were being displaced from their jobs on stations and forced with their families into alternative living situations such as fringe-camp settings and established "White Settlement" towns. Thus, the policy of assimilation led to shifts in dependency from the paternalism of stations and missions to reliance on government funding and services.

The process of social change and adaptation clearly impacted on Aboriginal male attitudes to women. Traditionally, women had power which they relinquished to men at times of initiation. Of recent times, there has been a shift in which Aboriginal women are seen to have independence and empowerment. Aboriginal women became more vocal and protective of themselves as they moved from using culturally relevant forms of assistance to using White Australian dominant reliance on the law through the police, courts and the correctional systems which resulted in their men being imprisoned for violence towards women and other offences.

Change also occurred in the sacred roles of men and women and the traditional practices of the Law, rituals and customs. Aboriginal people, particularly children, began to learn English as their first language and thus the law and culture needed to be articulated in a different way, impacting on daily life and the internalisation of the Law and culture. Some stories, dances and myths were destroyed of their meaning and symbolism due to the difficulties in translating and verbalising movements into English for the young to understand. In addition, many of the young were not brought up on the traditional lands from which the many cultural aspects developed and thus they missed the significance of the role of the land and people in the Law and the Dreaming. In addition, children came to "possess powers they never had traditionally - the power to abandon Aboriginal culture in favour of that of whites" (Tonkinson,

1982, p.126), which was encouraged and reinforced by the White Australian policy of "assimilation".

White Australian acceptance and respect for Aboriginal culture and life-style was not considerably changed as a result of the policies of assimilation - a process focussing on Aboriginal change, and which changed for bilateral reasons: Aboriginal people did not disavow their Aboriginality and despite formal policies they remained functionally excluded. Additionally, attempts to become economically independent failed due to mismanagement, lack of skills and resources, and opportunism on the part of White Australians. Thus, during the period of assimilation Aboriginal peoples entry into the White Australian economic life remained limited, controlled and conditional. While the last of the federal legislative restrictions on Aboriginal access to social security were lifted in 1966, it was not until the 1970s, after the adoption of the policy of self-determination that the state controls of Western Australian Aboriginal communities were relinquished.

1.1.4   Self-determination and Control

With change in focus to self-determination, the process of identification for the Aboriginal person required both recognition and confrontation. Dudgeon and Oxenham (1988) described a "sequence of what happens to some Aboriginal people in the path of self-awareness" (p.10). In their paradigm the individual passes through successive stages of:
∑   'internalisation and shame' involving the internalisation of dominant culture values and attitudes to Aboriginals;
∑   'resistance, active and passive to those internalised negative views;
∑   'acceptance' of positive views of Aboriginals, with questioning of dominant culture stereotypes of Aboriginal people;
∑   'hostility' and rejection of those views with an appropriate emotional response (anger) to those that hold them;
∑   'consolidation' of the newly emergent referents of Aboriginality, and active and open demonstration of these referents;
∑   and 'self-actualised Aboriginality', a rapprochement in which 'the individual has accepted their Aboriginality and also there has been an acknowledgement and working through of those parts of themselves that reflect dominant society values, with some retained and some rejected" (p.11).

Nationwide, the major verbalised demand of Aboriginal was for autonomous control of land and services. As a result a new political structure was necessary. The term "community" began to replace terms such as settlement, mission, and pastoral properties. For some isolated communities the new political structures required the demonstration and exercise of authority in ways alien to their previous experience. External controls were removed, problems related to alcohol use were emerging and in some ways all of this was compromising the tenuous authority of the older generations.

In the 1960s and 1970s the consequences of White Settlement were profound for Aboriginal people raised in the bush or those coming into settlements. They had no interim period to develop adaptive coping strategies and encountered a majority

culture that did not value their traditional identity. The impact of alcohol and other White Australian introduced commodities became an issue of concern amongst this group of Aboriginal people. Aborigines from mission settings also experienced difficulties with the self-determination focus. The removal of mission structure was not accompanied by the development of alternatives. Hence, the absences of authority and leadership for some communities and the disruptive consequences of heavy drinking compounded their difficulties in working towards the European concept of self-determination.

For the Aboriginal population who had grown up and lived in fringe camps the situation did not change substantially. This group continued to minimise the impact of external controls on their way of life which conversely involved a relatively greater exposure to the acculturative stresses that are part of fringe-camp existence. They seemed to develop considerable 'street sense' and ability to work the system with a limited field of power.

Station based Aboriginal people seemed to have fared relatively better than other groups in their adaptive transitional identity facilitating the development of an enduring internal structure. Those that remained on their stations and even those who left a decade ago demonstrated confidence and self-esteem not evident to such a degree in other populations (Hunter 1993).

There were also changes and consequences for children. The movements from stations and missions to fringe-dwellings and towns meant high population densities and increased proportions of children within communities. Parents became vulnerable to the White Australian influences of gambling and drinking, resulting in parents being absent from the nuclear family for periods of time. Thus, the children's role models for learning culturally appropriate gender roles were either absent or disempowered (as the case with some Aboriginal elders). The change in environments and conditions of living further disadvantaged Aboriginal people by the health consequence of those environments (eg. ear diseases, repeated infections throughout childhood, different feeding, dietary and hygiene practices etc.). Hunter (1993) summarises the impacts well when he stated that "the most significant issues affecting Aboriginal childhood have been a breakdown of the processes (both traditional, and on stations and missions) that structured and made safe periods of development transitions." (p. 236) For example, the rituals, social controls and expectations that guided males through adolescence from boyhood to the social expectations of manhood, have become less obvious. Lastly, Hunter (1993) points out that when "deprived of the social symbols and structures that ground coping and adaptive process in the wider society there is frustration and anger - externalised towards White Australians and the government policies, and/or internalised towards their culture, their partners and themselves" (p.236). In the next section we will be outlining these and other impacts of the social policies developed by the State and Federal government bodies in Australia.

1.2   Government History of Involvement with Aboriginal People

The colonists saw the 'inability' of Aboriginals to survive as support for their social Darwinist ethos, which saw the English as the superior race, and Aboriginal

people as the 'inferior' race heading for extinction. The colonists felt that as the superior race it was their duty to 'protect' Aboriginals from themselves, and thus policies based on protectionism, excessive control and paternalistic welfare were developed. In terms of Government history of involvement in Aboriginal issues, legislative acts which formalised these early policies have been numerous and it is essential to at least discuss the significant ones, and their effect on the lifestyles of Aboriginal people.

The *1834 Foundation Act* established in South Australia and blueprinted in most Australian states espoused humanitarian notions to protection of Aboriginal rights to land. However, the British declaration that Australia was *terra nullius* (un-occupied land) as well as their commercial interests in Australia pre-determined that land rights were never on the political agenda.

The *1842 Waste Lands Act* created "Protectors" of Aboriginals to act as guardians over all social, economic and sexual aspects of their lives. This led to the establishment of reserves which limited Aboriginal peoples' traditional freedom of movement. It also meant that Aboriginals were not supported in their traditional, nomadic existence, but were expected to cultivate land. The skills required to develop the land were not taught to them and thus the change into a different form of subsistence seemed doomed for failure. Eventually, the land was leased back to White Australian farmers to control. By the 1950's, the failure of such programmes as the Waste Lands Act propelled the Government to withdraw its financial and administrative responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs (Markus, 1990).

From 1850 to 1897, Aboriginals relied on philanthrophic and church groups for support. Many missions were formed during this time and they had autonomy in instituting control over Aboriginals with minimal State intervention. The creation of reserves and missions was largely a result of pressure from the British Government on colonial administrators upon hearing of the massacres and gross maltreatment of Aboriginals (Reid & Trompf, 1991). These reserves restricted the movement of Aboriginal people and denied them contact with 'their world'. At this time, pastoralists, pearlers and miners were commercially dependant on Aboriginal labour, and this was often exploited via minimum wages and poor living conditions (Crawford, 1993). The power of politics within this realm was evidenced in Western Australia through the granting of self-government by the British parliament in 1889. One notable outcome was that the new Government was no longer answerable to any constitutional power and were not under any obligation to guarantee the rights and interests of Aboriginal people.

Between the period 1897 - 1915, government policies were developed for Aboriginal people in most states of Australia (Brock, 1993). The Federation of Australia in 1901, resulted in the Australian parliament formalising self-government in each State. At the time the institutionalisation of Aboriginals on reserves and missions continued and the depletion/destruction of their culture, pride and traditional ways of living for commercial interests also continued.

The formalisation of protectionist and control policies*, the *Aboriginal Protection Act of 1897*, was endorsed by most Australian States. It was initially introduced in

Queensland then Western Australia (as the 1905 Act), South Australia and the Northern Territory (Brock, 1993). State control over Aboriginal affairs continued with little to no Federal Government intervention until 1911. However, when there was a national call for Federal control over Aboriginal affairs, the Federal Government refused to participate in what they viewed as a political minefield, particularly given the atrocities committed against Aboriginals were becoming known internationally.

In 1934, the Federal Government's stance was challenged by a Royal Commission hearing. The Commission resulted in the *Native Administration Act of 1934* in which Commissioner Moseley advocated increased confinement, removal of children from parents for training, and consequences for cohabitation between the races. This 'consequence' effectively involved further confinement and social restrictions for Aboriginal women who had given birth to 'half-caste' children. All half-caste and quarter-caste children were removed to be placed in homes for the purpose of being integrated into mainstream society. The Royal Commission also led to the first inaugural meeting between State and Federal Government. This resulted in a formalisation of policies for Aboriginal people and although this was the first time in which Federal Government were involved in Aboriginal Affairs their involvement was considered peripheral rather than official.

By the 1940's changes slowly occurred for Aboriginal people due largely to the outbreak of World War II. The Australian Army became dependant on Aboriginal labour and for the first time Aboriginals received the same income and food rations as White Australians (Reid & Trompf, 1991). The trade unions also began to loosen their bans on Aboriginal workers in recognition of the war effort. *The Bateman Enquiry of 1947* concerned itself with the appalling living conditions of Aboriginal people and resulted in support for "assimilation or integration" as the new policy for Aboriginal people. Access to some social services became available and Aboriginal people were able to claim 'citizenship' rights in most States. The conditions of 'citizenship' involved satisfying a magistrate that they would no longer associate with other Aboriginals and aim to acquire similar living standards as 'White Australians'. The idea of the new assimilation policy was that Aboriginal people should be allowed to attain the same standards of living as 'other' Australians. However, the basis of the assimilation policy is now perceived as the policy to 'breed out' Aboriginality, by encouraging association with the wider community and vigorously discouraging association with other Aboriginal people.

In the 1950's the assimilation policy led to the dissolution of the all-embracing role of the Department of Native Affairs who handed over the fields of education and health to the Education Department and Public Health Department, respectively. In 1951, Compulsory Education was introduced and the Superintendent for Native Education was appointed to maintain close liaison with the Education Department (Mullard, 1974). In 1959 universal access was granted for aged and invalid pensions, widows pensions, unemployment and sickness benefits, maternity allowance and child endowment. Although access was granted Aboriginal people were still not considered to be part of the 'deserving poor', and had to open their lives to public scrutiny by the Department of Social Services (DeMaria, 1986).

Access was made difficult due to the anti-welfare prejudices that were intrinsic in the Department and control over Aboriginal lifestyles remained evident.

Access to state housing also became legislation in the mid-1950's which was launched by the Department of Native Welfare through the State Housing Commission (Berndt, 1969). One hundred houses were built and those taking up the offers were left to relocate in unfamiliar and usually racially charged towns which objected to having to deal with the 'Aboriginal problem' in their own backyards. This first attempt at housing was considered disasterous with only 30% of occupants remaining in housing after the first year. Another scheme was launched in 1959 which was based on moving through different 'stages' of housing from basic to conventional homes. This programme was more successful and subsequent State and Federal Governments have since increased the number of houses available. From this success came various social and financial problems which were not initially accounted. Many Aboriginal people encountered difficulties in trying to move from living a traditional, remote, dependant lifestyle, to suddenly owning their own homes with rent bills and ancillary costs. Pressure of ownership developed which was consistent with White Australian's perspective of "owning your own home" and contradictory to the traditional Aboriginal views of sharing and living a nomadic, hunter-gather subsistence lifestyle. The notion of 'budgeting' for rent, groceries etc was also problematic, particularly as Aboriginal people were not encouraged to have their own money to spend. There was also the influence of the cultural obligation to look after relatives who didn't have somewhere to live. This was difficult to account for in the budgeting of the househould as the number of occupants varied from day to day, month to month etc, and the idea of saying "no" to family obligation was not an option.

In 1962 Aboriginal people were finally given the right to vote but this was not compulsory (Markus, 1994; Reid & Trompf, 1991). Over the next ten years each State began to grant Aboriginal people rights to make their own decisions regarding alcohol consumption, entering hotels and public bars, and so forth. The end of prohibition for many Aboriginal people was the final mark of equality. The impacts of alcohol were evident within the Aboriginal communities' management and ways of living. For many Aboriginal people, alcohol represented one way of coping with the pain of loss of family, traditions, culture, pride and their affiliation with the land. The overt racism that continued to exist within Australia was also a constant reminder of the attitudes that Aboriginal people were 'culturally inferior', and the institutionalisation of racist policies made it difficult to attain an equal education or a steady job.

In 1967 Aboriginal people were for the first time included in the Referendum which resulted in the Federal Government finally assuming power to legislate on Aboriginal issues. The State Governments were no longer autonomous in their decision-making and they became accountable and answerable to a Federal constitution (Crawford, 1989).

From the appointment of the Whitlam Government in 1972, began the most exciting era of social reform in Australia's political history. The new Government targeted Aboriginal affairs as a priority and immediately denounced the

assimilation policy and replaced it was a policy of 'self-determination'. This represented the first time that Aboriginal issues were confronted openly and involved Aboriginal people themselves. The Native Welfare Departments were abolished and replaced with the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and Native Welfare became "The Department for Community Welfare". This marked the beginning of recognition that welfare was not solely an Aboriginal issue. Thus, community welfare became solely involved with statutory matters related to the protection of children, and the Department for Community Welfare retained powers and responsibilites for the removal of children (Aboriginal and White Australian) from their abusive families. This process was also open to scrutiny and required specific evidence of abuse rather than simply pleading moral endangerment.

The DAA became responsible for the new Commonwealth policy of self-determination. The Labour Whitlam Government was serious about Aboriginal reform and doubled expenditure on Aboriginal programs from $89.8 million in 1973 - 1974 to $173.1 million in 1975 - 76 (Reid & Trompf, 1991). The Federal Government funding for Aboriginal issues resulted in significant improvements in access to services which were previously financially abdicated by the States (Reid & Trompf, 1991). Self-determination also resulted in Aboriginal people taking on responsibility for their own issues which were previously controlled by white administrators. The Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) was established in 1971 and other specific services also started to emerge. Increased employment opportunities for Aboriginals in the Public Service also provided a voice in what was previously a White Australian forum and it led to the improvement of service delivery to Aboriginal people. The creation of teacher (Aboriginal Education Workers - AEWs) and police aide positions also enabled Aboriginal people to affect policy and move towards challenging the racism and biases which existed and remain within these systems.

The change in government in 1979 (Liberal Government - Prime Minister, M.Fraser) resulted in a change of emphasis from self-determination to 'self-management'. This was an attempt to allocate responsibilities for Aboriginal Affairs back to the States and the Aboriginal communities within each State and Territory (Bryson, 1992). The succeeding Hawke Labor Government of 1983 remained fairly residual in their Aboriginal policy, although they switched back to supporting the notion of self-determination. In 1990 (Labor Government - Prime Minister, P. Keating) cross-party political support was given to the process of reconciliation, which marked the first time in which a Government had publicly recognised the injustices of the past and set about to rectify previous wrong-doings. The Prime Minister, himself, worked on the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio in consultation with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Robert Tickner. In March 1990, the DAA was replaced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) which gave Aboriginal elected Councillors the power to make funding decisions within their own electorates (ATSIC General Report). It also provided Aboriginal organisations with the power to set up their own agencies or programmes to help deal with Aboriginal social issues from housing to alcohol rehabilitation and so on. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1988 - 1991) and its recommendations were also an attempt to provide

justice for Aboriginal people. However, the conclusions derived from the enquiry (ie. Some Aboriginal deaths in custody not being attributable to wrong-doing on behalf of Police) created an angry reaction in Aboriginal communities who believed that the police and other justice agencies were partly responsible for the deaths in custody. Finally, the 11-volume report released in 1991 made numerous recommendations and to date it is not clear how many of the recommendations have been implemented or adopted in current practices.

The High Court of Australia's 1992 Mabo Judgement was the final phase of laying to rest all existing policies which denied Aboriginal people of their land, pride and culture. The Mabo judgement finally rejected the notion that Australia was *terra nullius* and recognised Aboriginals as the first land owners of Australia. This decision resulted in a flood of claims to the High Court. Although Mabo seemingly had the potential to reconcile Aboriginal and White Australians for the first time, mass hysteria created by media and ignorance of its function seemed to re-ignite the divisions between the two cultures. The High Court challenge (via Liberal Premier, Richard Court) to the Mabo Judgement in 1992-1993 further fueled this issue which today remains unresolved and contentious.

As for the Department for Community Welfare, it has undergone a number of name changes since 1972 - from the Department for Community Services in 1989, to the Department for Community Development in 1992, and finally, the Department for Family and Children's Services in 1994. The Department's treatment and service delivery to Aboriginal people has also undergone a number of important changes. For example, Family & Children's Services currently has an Aboriginal Child Placement Policy which states that should Aboriginal children be removed from the care of their natural parents they can no longer be placed with White Australian. This policy also recognises that the best place for Aboriginal children to grow up is with their natural parents and/or extended family groups. Permission has to be gained from the Minister before an Aboriginal child is allowed to be placed with non-Aboriginal/White Australian carers, and the Minister must be satisfied that all other avenues have been exhausted. Placement is still considered to be temporary, pending identification of any appropriate Aboriginal carers in the future. Reconciliation of the child with their natural parents is also a major priority of the Department for all children (Aboriginal, White Australian or other) and as such contact between parent and child is encouraged and facilitated regardless of race or creed.

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