

Black and Bloody Beautiful

By Naima Green

Honours Thesis Harvard University USA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	2
A Discussion of the Meaning of Black Power in Urban Aboriginal Australia.....	3
Important Precursors to Black Power.....	10
Coming Together: The Making of a Movement.....	21
Influences From Overseas.....	27
1969: The Year of Black Power.....	40
Why Not Brown Power?.....	59
Travelling to America.....	68
Manifestations of Black Power in Australia.....	73
Effects of Black Power in Australia.....	85
References.....	89

ABSTRACT

The Black Power movement in Australia was led by a network of three small groups of young, Aboriginal activists based in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. By identifying tactics of activism that captured enough attention to produce white media coverage and mobilizing peers that were ready to see an improvement in the day-to-day life of Aboriginal people, these charismatic leaders set the tone for Aboriginal political and social activism most significantly between 1968 and 1972. While drawing heavily upon the rhetoric of African American figures such as Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, Bobby Seale, Huey P. Newton, and Angela Davis, Aboriginal Black Power activists also took notice of literature and politics being produced by Native Americans, and in China, Vietnam, South Africa, the Caribbean, and several other countries undergoing revolution in the Third World. Attuned to these global liberation movements, the Aboriginal Black Power movement represented a shift in the way that Aboriginal people saw themselves in relation to their domestic environment and identification with a wider effort by oppressed peoples around the world to determine their own destinies. Manifestations of the movement include an enduring message of Aboriginal pride, the first ever Aboriginal Tent Embassy, a renaissance of Aboriginal arts (particularly in the performing arts), and a number of community social services that have expanded across Australia and still exist today; these services include the Aboriginal Legal Services, Aboriginal Medical Services, fresh fruit and vegetable and breakfast-for-children services, and the Aboriginal Housing Companies of New South Wales. While the Black Power Movement in Australia did not dominate domestic politics to the extent that it did in America, the movement shaped a large number of key contemporary Aboriginal leaders and political commentators.

A DISCUSSION OF THE MEANING OF BLACK POWER IN URBAN ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

For the young activists taking to the streets in the late 1960s in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, Australia, “Black Power” had a range of meanings. One of the most frequently quoted explanations of the phrase was written by Bobbi Sykes in her 1975 debate with anti-Black Power Aboriginal Senator Neville Bonner. Sykes called Black Power “the power generated by people who seek to identify their own problems and those of the community as a whole, and who strive to take action in all possible forms to solve these problems.”¹ In her definition, Sykes articulated Black Power as a call for self-determination and community control within Aboriginal Australia.

Her definition withstood the test of time. Over thirty years later, Gary Foley, an activist in the Redfern Black Power movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, echoed Sykes’ sentiments in a personal interview. Foley explained that, even if the black men were “yellow men in Vietnam,” Black Power was “the right of a people to self-determination, to control their own destinies as nations and people.”

While Sykes’ definition excluded any mention of color and Foley’s highlighted the universality of the struggle, Brisbane organizer Sam Watson emphasizes upon the

¹ Bonner, Neville and Bobbi Sykes. *Black Power in Australia*. South Yarra, VIC: Heinmann Educational Australia Pty Ltd, 1975. p. 10.

significance of specifying Blackness in the movement. In a 2007 interview, Watson said:

“It was [about] taking ownership. We had been told that black was bad and everything white was good. Jesus was white, white lies. We were taking ownership through that phrase, Black Power.”

Aboriginal Black Power activists since the 1970s have emphasized control, ownership, and self-determination as significant concepts represented by the phrase “Black Power.” Through all of these definitions, we many understand Black Power as emerging from the need of a historically marginalized and disempowered people to manage their own affairs.

Through its message of ethnic empowerment, Black Power offered indigenous Australians several avenues to assume greater authority in managing their communities. Thus, Black Power activists sought to transform political, psychological and organizational structure of newly formed urban Aboriginal neighborhoods in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Historian Kathy Lothian attributes the political inspiration for the movement to Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton’s 1967 book, entitled *Black Power*. Lothian pinpoints the emphasis in the Aboriginal movement of Carmichael and Hamilton’s “new consciousness among black people.” While the political ideology of the Aboriginal Black Power movement borrowed heavily from Black Nationalism theories in America, the manifestations of the movement proved both relevant to Aboriginal people living in Australian cities and original. For example, Carmichael and Hamilton’s impetus towards a “third party” or “independent

politics”² was embodied most clearly in the Aboriginal Black Power movement through the 1972 Aboriginal Tent embassy, which Black Power activists erected to pressure Parliament to increase Aboriginal political representation in the Australian government.

Lothian also identifies a second arm of Koori³ Black Power that adapted the sentiment of the US Black Power movement to the context of the Aboriginal struggle. “Culturally,” she says, “it was a reinstatement of pride in indigeneity. What did it mean to be an Aboriginal person in Australia and in the modern world?” Present in the Black Power movement among Aboriginal Australians was a tangible turn towards a new identity that helped mobilize community cooperation at the grassroots level. As articulated by Aboriginal academic and activist, Jacqui Katona, this new attitude of indigenous urbanites carried with it a “responsibility to assert identity to other black people and make a strong stand on issues.” Her explanation of these responsibilities resonates strongly with Carmichael and Hamilton’s conceptualization of a “sense of peoplehood: pride rather than shame, in blackness, and an attitude of brotherly, communal responsibility among all black people for one another.”⁴

During an interview about the movement in August 2007, Katona underscored the risk that assuming a change towards greater consciousness entailed for Aboriginal people. Since the 1800s, the attitude of whites towards Aboriginal people had been one of paternalistic supervision—an expression of white supremacy and responsibility

² Ture, Kwame and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. New York, NY: Random House, 1967. p. 176

³ ‘Koori’ is a word used by Aboriginal people, most commonly in New South Wales and Victoria, for people of Aboriginal ethnicity.

⁴ *Ibid*, xvi.

to ‘care for the wayward natives.’ As expressed by Katona, “the previous survival mode for Aboriginal people was to avoid the penalty of being split up from family, to avoid being jailed, to avoid confrontation because of serious penalties.” In June 1883 an Aborigines Protection Board was established in New South Wales. Then, in 1909, the Aborigines Protection Act⁵ was passed. Under this act, managers from white-owned missions began to take away thousands of Aboriginal children, who now make up the ‘Stolen Generations,’ in order to expunge their Aboriginality and assimilate them into white society. Not until 1940 was it possible for Aboriginal people to gain citizens’ rights in New South Wales, and only in special circumstances in which they could prove that they were able to work for and support themselves.

After years of having the Aborigines Protection Board or Department of Aboriginal Affairs “say what our future would be,” Aboriginal people were ready by the late 1960s “to be involved about how our community would be run,” says Sydney Black Power leader Paul Coe. Fellow Sydney activists Sol Bellear and Naomi Mayers echo Coe, drawing a strong distinction between life during their parent’s generation on a white-controlled mission, and the move to Redfern, an urban, Black Power center in Sydney. In a conversation about the way that Black Power helped to redefine racial interactions as Aboriginal people moved out of these rural areas, Bellear reflected upon the mission days:

“Before [Kooris were] a group of people that had a barbed wire fence around them...[You needed] permission to get off the mission, for who you married, [there were] reserves, missions... We were on

⁵ The Aborigines Protection Board Act, enforced by the Aborigines Protection Board, worked to “protect” the interests of Aboriginal people such that they might, someday, advance to a point of assimilation with the white community. The act enforced strict control over the lives of Aboriginal people, restricting, for example, the sale of alcohol to members of this race. For more information, see “A Guide to Aboriginal Records” at the website of the State Records Authority of New South Wales.

isolated land that whites thought was worthless, isolated, out of sight and out of mind. We were controlled, our kids were taken away—if your kids were light-skinned, they were taken away. Women went to homes and were trained as domestics, males were trained as farm hands... We were made into a pool of labor for farmers and rich white people.”

Mayers agreed, recalling times when Aboriginal people had to depend upon “a white boss with [a] white mission manager deciding how you spent your money, even who fathered what kids sometimes.” However, she called Black Power a way of “getting back” to the things that “we wanted to do, where to go, what to buy” for Aboriginal people across Australia. For young urban activists during the Black Power Movement in Australia, Black Power allowed them to reclaim dignity not only for themselves, but for the mistreated generations that had preceded them, as well. The new concept of black consciousness during the Black Power movement required many weary Aboriginal people to battle historically ingrained concepts of Kooris as incapable in addition to fighting inequalities in economic status, political representation, and access to social services facing indigenous communities. Given the shift in mindset that asserting Black Power required, Katona makes clear that the concept remained “very confrontational” for many Aboriginal people.

It is important to understand that the young Aboriginal indoctrinated of Black Power were of the first generation to move from more remote Aboriginal communities on reserves and missions controlled by white managers to urban communities such as Redfern in Sydney and Fitzroy in Melbourne. Figures compiled by the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics in the Census of Population and Housing indicate a huge migration of Aboriginal people to major cities between 1966

and 1971; as rural Aboriginal settlement steadily declined, the percentage of Aboriginal people living in urban communities during those years rose from 27.3% to 43.5%⁶. In inner city Sydney alone, the number of Aboriginal residents increased from 4,000 in 1966 to about 35,000 only two years later⁷.

During the mid- to late-1960s, Aboriginal people were very slowly gaining greater freedoms in some states like New South Wales and Queensland. Paul Coe explains the exodus of Aboriginal youth the cities as a result of “laws akin to South African apartheid” in more rural areas. Hence, many of his generation, which Coe describes as the first “to be allowed to leave the mission freely without being caught by the police,” used this opportunity to make a new life for themselves in the city.

Gary Foley’s account of why he never finished high school elucidates the type of motivation leading many of the teenagers and young adults moving to these cities to escape the provincial rural mindsets that had limited their achievement in their hometowns. After being kicked out of his nearly all-white school in the country town of Nambucca Heads, Gary Foley moved to Sydney to start a new life:

“In 1965, the local population in Nambucca Valley was at least 20% Aboriginal people. 20% of the local population, and yet in Maxwell High School when I was 15, there were only 2 Aboriginal kids and I was one of them. I was the first kid to go past fourth form... and I was showing that I was pretty smart. It was pretty apparent that I was gonna breeze through and matriculate. And at the end of fifth form...the headmaster called me in... To this day, I remember his words. He said, “We don’t want your kind here.” And I knew what he was talking about. I understood perfectly. That’s why there

⁶ Table 2, “The Aboriginal Population, Urban and Rural, Australia, Censuses 1966 and 1971” printed in: Bonner, Neville and Bobbi Sykes. *Black Power in Australia*. South Yarra, VIC: Heinmann Educational Australia Pty Ltd, 1975.

⁷ Foley, Gary. “Aboriginal Medical Services Cooperative Ltd-Redfern, A Political History.” *Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service 20th Anniversary Book*. Sydney: Aboriginal Medical Service Cooperative, 1991. p. 5

weren't any other Aboriginal kids in the school... This is why most of my generation headed for Sydney. As soon as I got thrown out of the school, I headed for Sydney and ended up in Redfern. And my generation in New South Wales was the first generation of Aboriginal people in New South Wales who had been given a small bite of the cherry of education.... We all sort of fell foul of country schools and things.”⁸

The Aboriginal youth who moved to large cities like Sydney at the end of the sixties were ready to see a palpable change in the treatment of Aboriginal people in both the country towns that they had come from and the cities to which they had moved. From their new vantage points in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, they witnessed several events that led them to adopt Black Power as a means to rectify the problems that they observed in these communities.



A map of Australia.

⁸ Foley, Gary. Interview with Mammad Aidani. “In Conversation with Gary Foley.” La Mama Theatre, Melbourne, Australia. 14 August 2007.

IMPORTANT PRECURSORS TO BLACK POWER

Three particular events in the mid-1960s gave young radicals moving to large cities much of the momentum that they needed to seize Black Power as a tool of political and socio-economic improvement for Aboriginal people. The 1965 Freedom Ride through New South Wales solidified connections of the struggle of Aboriginal people to the widely publicized African American civil rights movement and showed young Kooris that they could stand up to racism without being penalized. The 1966 Gurindji Walkoff set a precedent in a long-standing indigenous land rights campaign as the first dispute over lands that had been traditionally owned by indigenous people, pre-colonization, as opposed to mission or reserve lands. Finally, the 1967 Referendum served as a tipping point for these youth when it failed to bring the changes that the older generation of activists had promised that it would.

The Freedom Ride of 1965

By the 1960s, new international broadcast technology ensured that events occurring in one area of the world could be witnessed all around the globe. It was in this way that Australians became familiar with the Civil Rights Movement in America. Ann Curthoys, an Australian historian, writes that “[the] American civil rights movement was well known in Australia at this time, through press and television, both

of which covered it sympathetically”⁹. Inspired by the 1961 Freedom Rides in the southern United States and by the civil rights activism of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and CORE, Aboriginal student Charles Perkins organized a New South Wales Freedom Ride to draw attention to severe racial discrimination in the state and to administer surveys about “racial discrimination, living conditions, education, and health”¹⁰ from both indigenous and non-indigenous town-dwellers. In February 1965, a group of about 30 students from Sydney University’s Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA) embarked on the trip, traveling through several racist towns in New South Wales. Jim Spigelman, a head organizer of the trip who would much later become Chief Justice of New South Wales, wrote to members of U.S. organizations such as CORE and SNCC about the ride. Moreover, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” renamed “Our Struggle” in Australia, equipped organizers of the ’65 Freedom Ride with non-violent, direct-action ideology to guide their cause. Thus, four years after the US Freedom Rides and halfway around the world, the civil rights terminology and demonstrations that had originated in the African American freedom struggle were applied to an equally dogged racial justice campaign in Australia.

A participant in the 1965 New South Wales Freedom Ride, Wendy Golding, recounted in a 1994 interview that “racism [had become] very passive in many ways. It was just sort of ‘That’s the way it was’ and there wasn’t any evaluation as to the

⁹ Curthoys, Ann. “The Freedom Ride—Its Significance Today.” National Institute for the Humanities Public Lecture. 4 September 2002. p. 3

¹⁰ Ibid.

rights and wrongs of it, it was just life in the 1960s in small country towns”¹¹. For example, Aboriginal people in these towns frequently faced segregation and discrimination at rural movie theaters. Sydney Aboriginal rights activist Chicka Dixon spoke in a personal interview about growing up in an era when “picture theaters...had the first four rows roped off for boongs¹².” In those days, Dixon, said, “We used to have to wait for the lights to go off, and then we could go and take a seat.” Original Freedom Rider Gary Williams also attested to the racist rules in rural cinemas, saying, “My cousin still doesn’t know how ‘Gone with the Wind’ ended. They had to leave before it ended.” The 1965 Freedom Riders sought to challenge the prejudiced status quo in place in the towns that they visited on their tour.

The Freedom Ride’s organizer, Charlie Perkins, had made a habit of breaking the societal boundaries that limited Aboriginal people. In 1963, he had matriculated at the University of Sydney as one of two Aboriginal students admitted. Perkins went on to be the first Aboriginal university graduate in Australia. The other Aboriginal student at the university during Perkins’ matriculation, Gary Williams, cut his studies short to work with a judge in Sydney shortly before the Freedom Ride began. Although Williams left the university before 1965, he had been an active member of SAFA during his enrollment, and for a few days during the ride he also boarded the bus. Aside from Perkins and Williams, the group was made up of white, liberal students sympathetic to the plight of indigenous people in Australia. According to Williams, during his ride on the bus through Nambucca, Bowraville, and Kempsey, the riders would enter segregated public places to see whether the owners would serve

¹¹ Ibid, p. 8

¹² A derogatory name for Aboriginal people

a mixed group of white and Aboriginal people. One movie theater owner in Bowraville shut his entire theater down so that he couldn't be confronted "about Aboriginal people wanting to be let in through the front door." In fact, in many places along the Freedom Ride, whites responded with outrage to the notions of allowing equal service to white and Aboriginal people. The ride attracted enough media coverage to display to people outside of these country towns the extent of the racism being exercised in New South Wales.

As I was interviewing Gary Williams about the Freedom Ride in 2007, his wife Deidre interrupted, wanting to relay the impact of the 1965 Freedom Ride on her understanding as a young white girl of rural Aboriginal life:

"I grew up in...comfortable, middle-class, suburban Sydney, and I can remember... I was too young to be reading the newspaper, but I saw TV news and heard my parents talk. Where we lived there were no Aboriginal people. I never saw any, and the only place I saw them was in the suburbs in La Perouse, and we'd go there cause there was an Aboriginal guy who would do tricks with snakes. So we had no sense of how they lived. I thought it was the same as we did until the Freedom Ride told people like us that people were being excluded. We weren't in country towns. We had no idea, so it raised awareness that that was going on in our own country."

Because Aboriginal people lived primarily in rural areas until end of the 1960s, urban white Australians could easily live in ignorance of the situation facing this demographic—especially since the Aboriginal population appears to have been less than one percent of the national population at the time¹³. However, as proposed by

¹³ It is difficult to determine a great deal about the Aboriginal population in the 1960s given that Aboriginal people could not be legally counted in the Australian census until the 1967 Referendum (discussed in the next chapter). In 1971, parameters to record information on race in the census were redefined, and remote-area data collection techniques were revised to better identify the number of indigenous people living in Australia. Given these changes, the Aboriginal population could be estimated at .91% of the total Australian population in 1971. This is the earliest estimate of Aboriginal

Charles Perkins protégé Stephen Hagan during an interview, the Freedom Ride allowed the media to look at rural racism in a different light. By revealing the severity of racism in these towns— children not allowed to swim in pools, segregated cinemas, Aboriginal people banned from hotel bars—media coverage of the Freedom Ride brought the rural struggle of Aboriginal people to the living rooms of the urban Australian population. Still, the ride had mixed results. For some onlookers, Freedom Rider Gary Williams reckons, the Freedom Ride may have only “strengthened people’s biases.” Nevertheless, he says, it also “strengthened people who wanted to stand up and see equal rights for everyone.”¹⁴

For the frustrated Aboriginal youth just moving to Redfern in the mid-1960s like Gary Foley, “the Freedom Ride was the first time that we young mob saw blackfellas standing up to whites and not getting beat down for it.” Likewise, Sam Watson remembered in a 2001 interview that watching “Uncle Charlie Perkins” lead the Freedom Rides was a “huge morale boost for all of us.”¹⁵

Moreover, the ride introduced to these youth a relationship between their everyday experience and the Civil Rights movement in America. The youth had seen news broadcasted from the United States about the various protests and marches happening across America in the 1960s. Watching these news stories, Aboriginal youth who had moved to different cities, like Gary Foley, came to view America as “a big white country like Australia where blacks were being treated like shit in ways

representation in the Australian population available. For more information see the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ “The population census - a brief history” and *Australians: Historical Statistics*, edited by Wray Vamplew.

¹⁴ Williams, Gary. Personal interview. 19 August 2007.

¹⁵ Fletcher, Karen. “Sam Watson: a life-long fighter against racism.” 19 September 2001. Green Left Online. <http://www.greenleft.org.au/2001/465/25170>. Accessed 20 February 2008.

identical to our experience in Redfern.” As a result, young black Australians moving to cities began to contemplate the parallels between their lives and those of black Americans.

The Gurindji Land Claim of 1966

While the 1965 Freedom Ride allowed young Aboriginal people to better recognize similarities between the struggle for civil rights in America and Australia, 1966 brought about a breakthrough in the indigenous land rights campaign. The Gurindji Land claim set a precedent that, for later generations of Aboriginal land rights activists, legitimized the right to claim land that had been owned pre-colonially by a particular Aboriginal nation¹⁶. The Gurindji dispute began when a group of Aboriginal stockmen caused a stir by protesting their treatment on a cattle station in the Northern Territory. The disagreement began as a dispute over the workmens’ small salary, which many disgruntled Aboriginal people considered “slave wages.” However, historian Kathy Lothian says that the issue set a precedent when the Gurindji stockmen expanded their case to include land rights based on traditional ownership, as well:

“They set up camp at Daguragu, on traditional land. Initially they protested demanding equal wages. The longer the strike went on their position changed. They began to petition for the land they were working on. They had been paid virtually nothing for the entire time they were working on Wave Hill cattle station. Now they said, ‘Traditionally, this land is ours. We’ve occupied it since time immemorial and it belongs to us.’”¹⁷

¹⁶ By nation, I mean to specify a group of Aboriginal people, such as the Gurindji people, that shares a distinct language, culture, lifestyle and geographical region.

¹⁷ Lothian, Kathy. Personal Interview. 14 August 2007.

As explained by Lothian, the campaign's major significance was that it was "the first time a land rights campaign was fought over traditional lands." In the past, Aboriginal people had limited land rights claims to land where they lived on white-constructed and owned missions or reserves. The Gurindji case was not settled finally until 1975 with a symbolic handover of some of the Wattie Creek land to the leader of the walk-off, Vincent Lingiari. Nevertheless, the initial 1966 land claim inspired an entire generation of indigenous Australians to challenge government and private claims to land that they had occupied before colonization.

The 1967 Referendum

The late 1960s also constituted a period of great hope for Aboriginal political advancement. May 1967 marked the end of a ten year campaign spearheaded by the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) for constitutional reform that would improve government accountability to indigenous Australians. In that month, a referendum was held to amend two clauses in the federal constitution. The first clause, Section 51 (xxvi) stated that, "The Parliament shall, subject to the Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to...the people of any race other than the aboriginal race in any state, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws."¹⁸ Aboriginal people had only been deemed Australian citizens since 1948 by the Commonwealth of Australia's Citizenship Act. However, state governments, rather than the national government, maintained the right to limit and

¹⁸ The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Government Printer, Canberra, 1901

control Aboriginal citizenship rights. In a lecture to Sydney University students in 2005, Chicka Dixon explained that, due to this legislation, Aboriginal people could not receive national government funding. “What happened was you’d approach the federal government, and they said ‘We can’t help you,’” he said. “They didn’t have the jurisdiction.” With legislation concerning Aboriginal people relegated to state governments, Aboriginal citizenship rights remained vulnerable to regional variations in attitudes towards race relations. State governments enacted a range of policies regarding Aboriginal rights, and it was these policies that restricted the lives of the parents and grandparents of young Kooris moving to urban areas towards the end of the decade. Because of this pre-1967 law, around all of Australia, and especially in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, the rights to move freely around the state, to freely marry, to receive and manage one’s own wages, and to control one’s own children were either not granted or severely limited for Aboriginal people¹⁹.

During the 1967 Referendum, FCAATSI organizers also challenged Section 127 of the Constitution. It stated, “In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.”²⁰ Overturning this clause would allow Aboriginal people to be counted in the national census and to vote. However, because they did not have voting rights, Aboriginal people were not allowed to vote in the Referendum. Thus, FCAATSI, made up of both indigenous and white members, targeted White

¹⁹ Taffe, Sue. *Black and White Together*. St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2005. p. 88.

²⁰ The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Government Printer, Canberra, 1901

Australians, who had the right to vote in the Referendum, and worked to convince them of the urgency of their cause.

During the arduous ten-year campaign to bring the amendments to referendum and then to convince whites to pass them, FCAATSI organizers had their work cut out for them. Chicka Dixon, an activist of the generation that campaigned to change these clauses, remembers that during canvassing campaigns some whites would “spit in your face and then set a dog on you.” However, in the end their work paid off. The amendments passed on May 26, 1967 with an overwhelming majority, 90% of the white population, voting “Yes” at the polls.

While the success of the campaign represented a symbolic triumph for the hard-working FCAATSI members, it brought little change to the lived experience of Aboriginal people. “The federal government employed three people in a little office to take care of the federal issues for Aboriginal people,” says historian Kathy Lothian, but “there was no significant change in funding, no change in policy directives, and there was no change particularly in relation to land rights.” The Referendum’s meager results especially frustrated young Kooris, who had helped the older generation of FCAATSI members to campaign for the Referendum. According to Gary Foley, one of these young Kooris, the disappointment spurred his generation to seek new forms of Aboriginal activism:

“The older generation in the Aboriginal political movement had said to us young loudmouths and smartasses in Redfern, they said, you know, ‘Look, cooperate with this, help us with the campaign for this, and if we can get this through, things will change. It’ll be the, you know, the salvation.’ So, you know, we went along with it. We respected them. There were a lot of people to respect of them old

people. We did the right thing. Then nothing happened. In fact, things got worse 'cause the New South Wales government withdrew from Aboriginal affairs, [and] left Aboriginal people in limbo.”

As a result, says Foley, this new generation “rejected the methods and tactics of the older generation.”

Despite their loss of faith in the old style of Aboriginal political activism, young Kooris living in major Australian cities in the late 1960s wanted many of the same things that the previous generation had sought through the Freedom Ride, the '67 Referendum, and other earlier movements. In a personal interview, Pat Turner, a young student at the time of the Referendum, underscored the fact that, notwithstanding generational differences, “everyone was after an outcome where Aboriginal people wouldn't be marginalized, discriminated against, where we would get our resources and an improvement of socio-economics, and enjoy a better way of life as full citizens.” However, these young ones began to ask for something else, as well. They wanted self-determination. Both the disappointment of young Koori urbanites following the passing of the 1967 Referendum and their experiences living in major Australian cities made it difficult for them to continue to use the old channels of Aboriginal activism, and encouraged them to seek innovative ways of fighting for an improvement in the lives of their people. Realizing that they could only make slow progress by relying on the current avenues of help available to Aboriginal Australians, they set out to take control of their own communities and to change their own destinies rather than waiting for others to do so.



Charles Perkins swims with Aboriginal children in Moree pool on Wednesday 17 February (*Australian*, 19 February 1965, p. 4). The original caption read: 'Mr Charles Perkins, the part Aboriginal student leader, frolics with children in the swimming pool he helped desegregate. (Photo courtesy of Newspix)

Source: Ann Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: a freedom rider remembers*, Allen & Unwin, 2002.

COMING TOGETHER: THE MAKING OF A MOVEMENT

When a seventeen-year-old Gary Foley arrived to Redfern in 1965 after being expelled from his high school class, he experienced two major events that led him down the road to Black Power. First, he “got a good kicking from the coppers” at the Regent Street police station in Sydney. Foley, who is still upset about the beating today, says “they did it to me because I was black and for no other reason.” Nevertheless, he reckons, “if you were a blackfella in Sydney in 1965 and that didn’t happen to you, there was something dodgy about you.” Very soon after this event—Foley estimates that it was about a week later—Paul Coe, one of Foley’s colleagues at the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs, gave him a copy of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Foley was surprised by the parallels he found between X’s experience and his own, and says that the back-to-back events “radicalized” him.

Paul Coe had his own personal reasons for identifying with Malcolm X’s frustration with the unfair treatment of black people in the U.S. When asked about the motivation behind his activism, Coe replied, “Revenge. I had an uncle shot by the police. It was mainly revenge.” As more and more young Aboriginal people began to meet each other in cities like Redfern, they were able to commiserate about the

problems they encountered, which stemmed primarily from their unequal status in Australian society.

As can be observed from the experiences of Foley and Coe, one of the greatest problems for urban Aboriginal people in the 1960s was police brutality. However, as stated in the 1970 Black Panthers of Australia platform, the grievances of these young Kooris extended to issues of “land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace,” as well as control of decision-making in their own communities²¹. Young activists had inherited the fight for Aboriginal land rights from older generations. Moreover, the new pressures of living in the city threatened the daily lives of most Aboriginal people.

The young, charismatic Paul Coe described the situation that he and his peers observed during a 1972 interview, stating:

“This society offers nothing for black people. It only offers police oppression, ridicule. Kids die from malnutrition, constant racist, derogative remarks in schools—we get, sort of, institutionalized racism in the form of education syllabus [sic] where black people are talking about themselves as sort of Jacki-Jacki. There is no positive sort of image of black people in this society. It’s run by, caused, or used by the white media, and we’d like to change all this. Put up a positive image of black people thinking of themselves [as] people, utilizing their potential and diverting their potential.”²²

These concerns about urban Aboriginal people were compounded by concerns about the greater Aboriginal population, including those people living in rural areas, on missions and in reserves. In *Black Power in Australia*, Bobbi Sykes cited several reasons that “even suicide might be considered an alternative to allowing things to

²¹ Black Panthers of Australia, “Platform and Programme”, 1970 as printed in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus, p. 252

²² Paul Coe in *N’ingla A-na*. Dir. Alessandro Cavadini, 1972. Videocassette.

continue the way they are.” She wrote, “Black Australians suffer from the world’s highest infant mortality rate, the highest proportion of any nationality confined in gaols, alarmingly high leprosy and T.B. rates, life expectancy significantly lower than the white average, and, for those who do survive—poverty”²³. Sykes’ emphasis upon health and incarceration, as well as the poverty which characterized Aboriginal communities both urban and rural, further demonstrates the issues that made Aboriginal people feel abandoned by Australian policymakers and social services of the day.

Many young Kooris had become active in community or school organizations dedicated to improving life for Aboriginal people. Feeling in their element in the company of other youth who were dedicated to social change, they began to come up with new ways to address the issues that concerned them. Gary Foley writes that in Sydney, many young Kooris worked at the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs (FAA), a “social/welfare center established by community leaders”. Given the opportunity at the FAA to meet and converse with “aging legends of the indigenous struggles such as Bill Onus, Jack Patton, Bert Groves and Frank Roberts,” these youth gained a sense that they were next in line in the legacy of great Aboriginal activists that stretched back for generations. FAA social functions provided a meeting place for young, politically-inclined Kooris.²⁴ Moreover, young Kooris already involved in various efforts surrounding the Aboriginal cause brought others into their fold. As they encountered agitated peers, they began to meet up with each other to discuss their

²³ Bonner, Neville and Bobbi Sykes. *Black Power in Australia*. South Yarra, VIC: Heinmann Educational Australia Pty Ltd, 1975. p 27.

²⁴ Foley, Gary. “Black Power in Redfern, 1968-1972.” Unpublished bachelor’s (honors) thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, Australia. 5 October 2001.

problems as they understood and interpreted them. Paul Coe and Gary Williams, two of the young people that met in Redfern, remember how they first began to discuss their ideas. Says Coe, “I met [Billy] Craigie at the University of Sydney, Foley at Wayside Chapel, Williams at the Empress, and I just started asking people what they were interested in.” Each of these acquaintances would go on to be a major leader of the Black Power movement in Redfern. Williams recounts that, in the early days, the growing group of novice politicians often “met up at a club, and sat around talking. One of those ‘uni’ pubs. We had the same type of ideas.” Coe remembers that the young Kooris “started having brain sessions, discussing, reading, and seeing what to do to be involved”. These sessions led them to “form our own group to serve the needs [that the] conservative Aboriginal people” running the FAA were not addressing. Gary Williams attributes the political maturation of the core group that would lead the Black Power movement in Redfern to these sessions because they “crystallized” half-drawn thoughts into solutions through political action.

In Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne, the way that the young people who would soon lead the Black Power movement met and interacted with each other was very similar. In an interview, historian Kathy Lothian characterized these soon-to-be leaders as “younger, urbanized activists” who were generally “working class or maybe not even that” and settled “in poorer parts” of these cities. Despite the similarities of young people involved in the early movement, the ways that the Black Power groups began to take shape differed significantly.

Most notably, the Redfern and Brisbane groups organized in very different ways. Until 1968, these groups had little contact with each other. Most of their

differences resulted from the differences between the leaders of the two groups. In Brisbane, fiery leader Denis Walker and counterparts such as Sam Watson set up a headquarters for black political thought and trained a group of Aboriginal men and women who formed a coalition of Black Panthers that associated itself with the Panthers in America. Watson says that they would train peers entering the movement by running weekly “political awareness and rap sessions” out of a central Brisbane headquarters.

Gary Foley, who admired the cohesiveness of the Brisbane brigade, maintains that the Redfern group’s organization was not the same:

“Denis set up a big black commune and put a 44 gallon drum in the back, filled it with black dye and dyed everything black. So everything on Denis from his underpants out was black. In Redfern, we also set up a commune I suppose, but only to the extent that we withdrew it from Redfern to try to get it away from the police harassment. But there was a core: me, Paul Coe, Gary Williams, Lyn Craigie, her brother, Billy just a small core group. And we weren’t anywhere like Denis’ crew.”

As Foley describes, the Redfern crew— who activist Paul Coe claims he “hand-picked”—consisted of a small group of core members. Asked to estimate the number of members in the early days of their organizing, Gary Williams said that the initial group numbered around ten, but that by “talking at unis, holding lunchtime talks and things like that” this core expanded. In an essay on the Black Power movement, Gary Foley recorded several of the main participants, naming Paul Coe, Billy Craigie, Tony Coorie, John Newfong, Alana and Samantha Doolan, Lyn Craigie and husband Peter Thompson, Bob and Kaye Belleair, Naomi Mayers, Gary Williams, Norma Williams,

Pam Hunter, and Isobel Coe.²⁵ During an interview with Foley, he explained that “young mob gravitated towards us” because these budding leaders were a part of the community. While “some came to hang out of curiosity”, others “drifted off from alcohol or something.” Indeed, he emphasized that “all manner of people” came to be involved with the activist crowd. By the 1970s, some documents have reported the core Redfern group at 30 members.²⁶

Inside of the cores being built up in Sydney, Brisbane and in Melbourne, the budding activists were beginning to make connections between themselves and those participating in struggles and revolutions around the world. Overseas influences came from many sources, including broadcast media, reading materials, and visiting African Americans. Independently of each other at first, the groups of activists in each of these cities began to study Black Power.

²⁵ Foley, Gary. “Black Power in Redfern, 1968-1972.” Unpublished bachelor’s (honors) thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, Australia. 5 October 2001.

²⁶ “Simon Townsend Talks To The Leaders of the Black Panthers.” *The Australian*. 5 December 1971 printed in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus, p 254



Bruce Petty, The Australian

Source: Gary Foley, The Koori History Website, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history/toons/toon25.html>

INFLUENCES FROM OVERSEAS

The introduction of television and global media to urban Aboriginal life created one of several major distinctions between the lifestyle of Aboriginal people in the 1960s, especially in urban areas, and the lifestyle of previous generations. Chicka Dixon remembers, “We grew up on the mission. Never had no TV or anything. Saturday night we’d walk six miles to the pictures. Nobody had cars! Blacks never had cars, I’m talking 30s and 40s. It was a different lifestyle.” While building up enough wealth in the black community so that blacks could afford cars took more

time, the introduction of television exposed Aboriginal people to a multitude of current events and ideas that expanded their understanding of the world around them.

The 1960s were characterized by a series of revolutions and movements to end colonial imperialism in Africa and Asia, and also by the struggle of African Americans in the United States to improve their social, economic, and political circumstances through various forms of activism. As Sol Bellear recounted in an interview, broadcast media brought these struggles to the attention of Aboriginal people in cities like Redfern, and served as a “catalyst” by showing young Kooris how different methods of activism could affect changes for these international groups. The cores of young activists in Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne became avid students of struggles happening in different parts of the world.

Sam Watson describes the studies of the Brisbane youth, saying:

“We formed a cadre of political leadership to address the problems of Aboriginal leadership. It was strong. We were great students of political power. We looked at African nations, the struggles of people in India, Pakistan, in America in the Southern states like Alabama and the states below the Mason Dixon line. We were inspired by the tenacity of these movements and the ways that the movements were able to achieve such gains in their time. Things like the right to vote, getting people to register to vote, seeking proper jobs and housing and medical care. Relief from racist imprisonment, meeting with communities across the globe... We reached out for guidance.”

By 1968, reports of Black Power rallies and community programs, primarily spearheaded by the Black Panther Party in California, began to dominate American media. As asserted by Gary Foley, the urban Aboriginal youth “weren’t blind to the symbols that these guys in Oakland were developing.” The ideas that they took from

the movement in America began to enter the discussions that these youth were having in Redfern and Brisbane.

Taking into account the Freedom Ride of 1965, the concept of finding resonance with the struggle of black people in America was not a new one. In fact, Aboriginal contact and dialogue with black people from America and the West Indies can be traced back to Aboriginal interaction with African American boxer Jack Johnson in 1907. Moreover, historical research by Dr. John Maynard at the University of Newcastle reveals sustained interaction between Aboriginal wharfmen and African American and West Indian seamen through the 1920s, and the tremendous influences of Garveyite philosophy in the formation of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association in 1924²⁷. Paul Coe notes that youth in Redfern were affected by older activists in Manley and Victoria, such as Chicka Dixon, Bob Maza, and Bruce McGuinness, who had already begun having “deep and ongoing dialogue” with African American activists.

Maza and McGuinness in Melbourne were both quite active in the largely Aboriginal community of Fitzroy, and had begun to recognize the resemblance of battles being fought by African Americans to those that they faced in Melbourne. Especially after the failure of the 1967 Referendum to create real change for Aboriginal people, one area where they were able to make parallels between their situation and that of African Americans was through their frustration with the limitations of legislative change. Historian Kathy Lothian articulated during an

²⁷ Foley, Gary. “International Influences on the Australian Indigenous Resistance.” PowerPoint Presentation for *Australia Now*, Australian Centre, University of Melbourne. 30 March 2006.

interview that, “After the passage of the Voting Rights Act and other acts in US, African Americans saw you could have all the legislation in the world but it wouldn’t change your daily life. You can’t legislate away racism.” Aboriginal people in Australian cities were recognizing the same thing.

Reading

Resonating with the struggles that they observed on TV, politically-oriented Aboriginal urbanites began to educate themselves about the things that they observed by reading a wide array of literature coming out of countries in Africa, Asia and from both African Americans and Native Americans in the United States. A significant amount of this material was written by African Americans, and helped these Aboriginal readers to understand the reasons for and the history of the movements for change in Black America.

One book that had a particularly large influence upon Aboriginal youth was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Malcolm X’s story showed young Kooris how to funnel their frustrations surrounding treatment of Aboriginal people in Australian cities into constructive resistance. According to Kathy Lothian, X taught indigenous activists, like Melbourne’s Bob Maza, about black nationhood. “Maza has been recorded as saying that before he encountered X, his idea of being strong and independent was to go on the streets and beat people up,” she says. “After, he realized it was possible to be a proud Aboriginal man in a land of white racists, that it was still possible to live proud dignified life.” Hence, it was with this book that Aboriginal youth in Redfern such as Paul Coe and Gary Foley began their foray into black

political literature from the United States. Recognizing the parallels between the experiences that they read about in these books and the reality that they lived through every day, many young Aboriginal people expanded the breadth of the political material that they read. They delved further into the history of African American political thought by reading authors such as Garvey and DuBois. Moreover, they expanded their understanding of African American politics in the late 1960s by reading African American literature from a range of different writers from Baldwin to Black Muslims and Black Panthers. Many of these youth began to understand the spectrum of political stances spanning African American leaders; and with this in-depth comprehension of the African American movement, they were able to choose the leaders with whom they identified most closely. Rather than sticking to just one viewpoint or leader, young Koori readers often appreciated leaders spanning the spectrum of political viewpoints, as demonstrated by former FCAATSI Vice President Pat Turner:

“I’d read Angela Davis and everything there was to read out of the Civil Rights movement in the states, and I followed the news and the papers. I was an avid reader... and I was very influenced by those things. I had a poster of Martin Luther King on one hand because of his ability to lead the masses, and on the other hand of Angela Davis, a feminist activist. I wanted to be like both of them. They were my heroes.”

The young readers’ body of reading material also expanded to include material from other histories of resistance, such as *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970, Dee Brown) and *We Talk, You Listen* (1972, Vine Deloria, Jr.), two titles from popular Native American writers of the day, and *The Complete Bolivian Diaries of Che Guevara* (1968). Without a doubt, each of these international influences had a

striking effect upon the development of the Aboriginal political movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Nevertheless, the African American literature being read at this time made the most visible impact upon the formation of their new, urban movement. Reading an increasingly wider array of African American material, these Aboriginal youth began to mobilize to apply the political strategies outlined by their American role models to their own communities. Using these biographies and political manifestoes as guides for their own movement in Australia, these Aboriginal youth began to seek greater connections with other Black people overseas.

Getting Materials From Overseas

In order to obtain reading material from the black liberation struggle in America, many young Aboriginal intellectuals scoured the shelves of their local libraries and sought out specialty or political bookshops. Organizer Paul Coe recalls Gould's Communist bookshop in Redfern, where he visited often to read titles such as Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. Furthermore, Gary Foley writes that he and the Redfern gang started to acquire the material by stealing it from the store, but they later worked out a deal by which Gould would give it to them to read²⁸. While these titles may not have been available in mainstream bookshops, retailers with radical political slants like Gould's provided these budding Aboriginal activists with an attractive selection of literature about African American and other international accounts of political resistance. However, there were limitations to the

²⁸ Foley, Gary. "Black Power in Redfern, 1968-1972." Unpublished bachelor's (honors) thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, Australia. 5 October 2001.

amount of material about the Black people and Black Power in America that was readily accessible to the Australian public. As Aboriginal activists in Redfern and Brisbane became more educated on the political struggle of African Americans, they began to take advantage of personal relationships with contacts in Australia that could access more advanced materials for them.

A relatively large workforce of Aboriginal longshoremen²⁹ proved essential to several of the leaders of the emerging Aboriginal movement. Through connections with the workers that operated ports down the coast of Eastern Australia, activists could request illegally imported reading materials from America and other nations. Activist Chicka Dixon, who worked as a longshoreman in Sydney recalls that Jet and Ebony were barred in Australia. In actuality, these “middle-class magazines” proved less radical than many of the texts that the emerging Aboriginal activists coveted. Nevertheless, Dixon says that by getting copies of the magazines from Black passenger ships, he could at least get “an idea of what was going on” in Black America. Several of the activists living in Redfern consulted both magazines to gain a fuller idea of life for African Americans during the end of the 1960s.

When Brisbane activists set up the only chapter of the California-founded Black Panther Party in Australia in the 1970s, they managed to have materials printed by Panthers in Oakland transferred through Australian ports. In a personal interview, Sam Watson, co-leader of the Brisbane chapter, recalled that through these documents, the Aboriginal chapter “studied the language and structure” of how Panthers in

²⁹ Numbers of Aboriginal wharfmen had been disproportionately high in the comparison to Aboriginal representation in other sectors of the Australian labor market since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Oakland “politicized their entire experience.” These studies informed the organization and ideology of the Brisbane Panthers. Watson attested that his chapter “accessed material that would never go through customs” through networking and connections with the Shoreman’s union. However, he remained reluctant to elaborate upon the details of the clandestine process, worrying that some of the people that helped the Panthers get this material “are still alive.”

The Influence of African American Visitors Upon Urban Aboriginal Youth

It is undeniable that access to international broadcast media, African American literature, and, eventually, more elusive reading materials played a large part in the development of the Aboriginal Black Power Movement. Nonetheless, perhaps nothing was more influential in transferring ideas about the American movement to Australia than contact between African American visitors and budding Aboriginal activists in the 1960s and 70s. These African Americans not only added to the physical body of knowledge that the activists had accumulated by giving them books to read, but they also took part in the intellectual and political conversation sessions that had developed between young Kooris in these urban centers.

African American performers touring Australia brought conversations about Civil Rights, Black Liberation and the relationship of the African American movements to struggles of other oppressed peoples around the world to these Aboriginal urbanites. In 1960, actor, singer, and political icon Paul Robeson made a tour through Australia during which he spoke to a large number of laborers, white and Aboriginal. He sang, and he also delivered one of his most famous speeches for an

attentive audience of construction workers who were building the Sydney Opera House. Robeson took an interest in Aboriginal affairs. After learning about the struggle of many Aboriginal groups— particularly in rural Australia— to gain control of their land through land rights, he spoke on behalf of these indigenous Australians and lent weight to their cause. Gary Foley remembers that of all the African American performers who came through the city, Robeson made a particularly “deep impression, not only on Aboriginal Australians, but white workers, as well.” During an interview, he characterized Robeson as “an intensely strong black man who took no shit from no races.” While Robeson stood out as one of the first African American performers to take an interest in the plight of Aboriginal Australians, many soul groups and bands followed him during the 1960s.

As these African American visitors came and went, many Aboriginal urbanites began to notice that they often took a special interest in the indigenous communities of Australia. Foley commented, “It just seems to me the [black] performers who came to Australia in that era were very political.” Like Robeson, many other black American performers that visited the country throughout the decade made sure to have “a lot of close contact with Aboriginal communities in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane” when passing through Australia. Their interest in Aboriginal affairs and their political consciousness differentiated them from other American visitors. Among the entertainers and groups that passed through Aboriginal communities were Nina Simone, the Supremes, and Smokey Robinson and the Miracles.

Direct contact with African Americans, who paid attention to the Aboriginal movement because of its resemblance to their own, began to shape these Black

Americans as potential allies with whom to build transnational connections. However, even the young activists like Foley never assumed that all African Americans were on their side. He clarified during his interview that the close attention of African Americans who visited Aboriginal communities “made us more conscious of the ones that didn’t, like Sammy Davis, Jr.” Davis, Jr., who made several tours to Australia during the 1960s became notorious in the eyes of many Aboriginal Australians for his lack of attention towards Aboriginal issues and communities during his visits.

Treatment of African Americans in Australia

Upon arrival in the country, many African Americans learned very quickly the way that Australian racism worked. The experiences that Black Americans had in Australia gave them a degree of insight into the daily injustices facing urban Black Australians. White Australia policy, a collection of governmental acts restricting non-white migration to Australia, had been in place since 1901.³⁰ Foley reasons that the ill-treatment received by visiting black performers at the hands of immigration officials “further stimulated their interests in race relations in Australia.” Because of the discrimination that they encountered, many of these African American visitors opted to make social connections in urban Aboriginal communities.

One popular meeting place for visiting African Americans was Sir Doug Nicholl’s Fitzroy Church in Christ, the first Aboriginal Church in Christ in Australia.

³⁰ White Australia Policy is a name given to a collection of governmental acts instituted in Australian history, beginning with the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. Some of these laws acted to keep non-white persons, especially Chinese and Japanese migrants, out of Australia. Other laws, such as the Pacific Island Labourers’ Act, worked to expel indigenous people from neighboring islands who had come to the country decades ago to work in sugar cane fields in Queensland and New South Wales. White Australia Policy began to be phased out in 1967 under Prime Minister Harold Holt. See The Pacific Island Labourers Act (<http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item.asp?dID=15>) for more information.

Naomi Mayers, who sang in the church choir during her years in Melbourne, remembers it as “a community center [where] everybody could meet and have coffee.” Through the social interactions that occurred in spaces like Nicholls’ church, African Americans and Kooris exchanged stories about their respective experiences with racial injustice and systematic discrimination. Mayers maintains that black Americans like Harry Belafonte and Paul Robeson “were the only ones that kind of knew what was happening to Aboriginal people in this country.” Moreover, she says that Kooris “learned a lot of the stuff that was going on” in the US from these visitors.

In some instances, these encounters led to long-term relationships. Due to the small number of Aboriginal people in Melbourne, many of the Kooris looking to get married in the city found most other Kooris were related to them.³¹ In the view of Naomi Mayers, it was due to the small Koori community in Melbourne that many of the first Aboriginal men and women to move to the city married people from overseas. “A few of us married West Indians or Black Americans,” she says.

While in Melbourne, Mayers met an African American Roller Derby skater at a Maori Tiki Club, and they began a relationship that would last until he had to return to the United States three years later. Joseph Mayers, their son, and his cousin Felicia Robinson live in Redfern, Sydney today. They are two of a number of half-Aboriginal, half-African American/West Indian children that were born during the 1960s and 70s. Their lives have manifested the transnational connections that were cemented during these years—on visits through Oakland to see his father’s side of the

³¹ Mayers, Naomi. Personal interview. 25 August, 2007.

family, both Mayers and his mother perpetuate the spirit of communication between African Americans and Aboriginal Australians that thrived in the era of his birth.

Black Vietnam Soldiers in Australia

During the Vietnam War, many soldiers flew to Australia on leave for rest and recuperation (R&R). For this reason, the number of African Americans—especially young African American men—in Australian cities during the 1960s and early 1970s increased. Many young African American soldiers during the late 1960s were introduced to the emerging ideas of Black Power while fighting in Vietnam. One veteran remembers that he first read Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton’s 1968 book, *Black Power*, out “in the rice paddies” rather than at home in the urban American setting that the book examined³². Finding that their Aboriginal peers experienced urban circumstances that much resembled the situation at home, these two groups of young thinkers would engage each other in discussions about both Black Australia and Black America.

According to one article about Brisbane Panther Sam Watson:

“He would go out in the car with his father to pick up African-American soldiers who trying to hitchhike from Brisbane to the Gold Coast. ‘White drivers would stop for the white soldiers but they wouldn’t take the black troops. The [black soldiers] told us about the great leaders of the US civil rights movement, about the big marches they had been on and about being forced out of the ghettos in New York into fighting a war they really didn’t want to fight.’”³³

³² Terry, Melvin. Informal conversation. 12 April, 2008.

³³ Fletcher, Karen. “Sam Watson: a life-long fighter against racism.” 19 September 2001. Green Left Online. <http://www.greenleft.org.au/2001/465/25170>. Accessed 20 February 2008.

Sol Bellear added in a personal interview that in Redfern, African American soldiers told his peers and him about racism in the US Army. Bellear recalls being told that the tension between soldiers “was so overt that when shooting broke out, black GIs and white GIs would turn on each other.” The information that these young Kooris learned supplemented the stories that they read about Vietnam in newspapers or heard on the television. Furthermore, it enhanced their understanding of race and class in America.

During the war years, many of the visiting Black soldiers found apposite friends in the urban Aboriginal youth that they encountered. Gary Foley summarized his interactions with these soldiers by saying:

“We smoked a lot of dope together and in the course of that and drinkin’ and partying, a lot of interesting discussions occurred. A lot of ideas were talked about. Not all of the soldiers were intellectuals or activists, but in the social contact, with it came stimulating and interesting discussion and sharing of ideas. They mingled with us and learned a lot about Australia and we learned about current events like the Black Power Movement and Malcolm X in the US.”

These interactions between Aboriginal Australians and African Americans solidified conceptions of commonality between urban Black people in Australia and America. They continued through the next decade as African American soldiers, performers, athletes, seamen, and some other visitors continued to visit Australian cities.



Paul Robeson sings for workers building the Sydney Opera House, 1960.

Source: <http://folkstream.com/muse/robeson/>

1969: THE YEAR OF BLACK POWER

By the spring of 1968 the emerging groups of political thinkers from Redfern, Melbourne, and Brisbane came into contact and began to create a larger network of support for each other. Groups of activists from both Melbourne and Brisbane began to visit Sydney and “build up strong friendships” with the Kooris there after meeting at a FCAATSI conference in 1968. At the conference, Kath Walker, her son Denis Walker, and Don Brady from Brisbane and Bruce McGuinness and Bob Maza from

Melbourne's Aborigines Advancement League met members of the Redfern group. Each of these delegations discovered that they shared "almost identical political philosophy"—a desire to gain self-determination and economic independence through land rights and a more confrontational method than activists of the previous generation had used³⁴.

With extended contacts between groups of young activists in all three cities, the groups were able to influence each others' ideas. As members of these different regional groups learned about international movements, including the Black Power movement, they could apply these concepts to their own local movement and share their ideas with their growing network of fellow activists. Evidence that these ideas had begun to take hold materialized in 1969.

Easter 1969-The Black Power 'Takeover' in FCAATSI

At its Easter conference in 1969, the discussions about Black Power occurring in cities like Redfern, Brisbane and Melbourne penetrated FCAATSI's general body discussions. FCAATSI, the group that had taken the lead in promoting the "Yes" vote in the referendum to count Aboriginal people in the Australian census in 1967, has been compared by indigenous activists such as Gary Foley and John Newfong to the American National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). During an interview, historian Kathy Lothian paralleled the NAACP's support of

³⁴ Foley, Gary. "Black Power in Redfern 1968-1972." Unpublished thesis. 5 October 2001.

integration and middle class membership with the “assimilationist and middle-class” constituency of FCAATSI.

The Federal Council held its national conferences annually during the Easter weekend. The Easter conference of 1969 is known by many as the conference of “Aboriginal takeover.” As indicated in the *Ballarat Courier* on 25 September 1969, this takeover may be considered one of the first manifestations of Black Power in Australia because it signified a resolve that Aboriginal people should be in charge of Aboriginal Affairs.

Historian Sue Taffe chronicles how the conference unfolded in her history of FCAATSI, *Black and White Together*. On the second day of the conference, scheduled speaker Kath Walker issued a speech that ended with a warning to black Australians:

“Don’t wait or leave it to the white man to do your protesting for you[...]When you leave this Conference go back to your rat holes—rat holes you call homes—that you have inherited from the Australian society, unite your people and bring them out fighting.”³⁵

Taffe writes that at the end of the speech, delegate Ken Brindle unexpectedly interrupted the conference by leading 24 delegates to the stage. These delegates spoke about their experiences in communities across Australia and their hopes for the future. The delegates included young activists such as Bruce McGuinness of Melbourne and Denis Walker, who would later lead the Black Panther Party of Brisbane.

Aboriginal members of FCAATSI expressed through this takeover a desire to set the agenda for discussions on improving life for Aboriginal people. The

³⁵ Kath Walker, ‘Political Rights for Aborigines’, reprinted by CAR, MS 12913, SLV, quoted by Sue Taffe in *Black and White Together*

disruption, and the notion that blacks be able to set their own agenda without white co-leadership, shook the general body of FCAATSI. Just a year before at the 1968 FCAATSI meeting, the delegation had sung “black and white together” to the tune of American civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome”³⁶. Even though ideas of self-determination had been on the rise since the beginning of the 1960s³⁷, the viewpoints coming from around the country at the 1969 conference seemed to affirm these ideas more so than ever before. Using the notes of a conference attendee, Taffe records, “McGuinness asserted that ‘Aboriginal autonomy’ equalled [sic] ‘Black Power’” while “others, such as Marg Tucker from Victoria, rejected this assertive approach.”³⁸ Nevertheless, the ‘takeover’ made it clear that some members of the organization, particularly young ones like Walker and McGuinness were ready for a change.

Taffe’s account of the 1969 conference demonstrates how Black Power ideas began to creep into the rhetoric of those involved in Aboriginal organizations during that year. She explains the influence of Hamilton and Carmichael’s definitive book, *Black Power*, on many members of FCAATSI saying, “Kath Walker urged Jack Horner [then FCAATSI’s general secretary] to read it, Dulcie Flower [the past general secretary] borrowed a copy to read and Bruce McGuinness was observed engrossed in it at a FCAATSI conference.”³⁹ Moreover, she writes that communications innovations such as transistor radios, which allowed even remote Aboriginal communities access to Australian and international news, and Aboriginal newspapers

³⁶ Taffe, Sue. *Black and White Together*. St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2005. p. 220

³⁷ Lothian, Kathy. “A Blackward Step Is A Forward Step.” Unpublished masters thesis, Department of History, Monash, Australia. 2002.

³⁸ Taffe, Sue. *Black and White Together*. St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2005. p. 247

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 250

“circulated ideas and encouraged the growth of a national Aboriginal consciousness.”⁴⁰

This increase in Aboriginal consciousness cemented complaints from some leaders in the early 1960s that multiracial organizations like FCAATSI were “not representative of Aborigines *or genuine Aboriginal opinion* [original emphasis].”⁴¹

Recently, indigenous leaders around the country had begun to supplement multiracial organizations like FCAATSI with all-Aboriginal organizations like Adelaide’s Council of Aboriginal Unity, the Brisbane Tribal Council and the Victorian Aboriginal Tribal Council. Some, like McGuinness, related the new push towards Aboriginal unity, consciousness, and autonomy to Black Power. However, the discussion of Black Power until the end of 1969 stayed limited, for the most part, to activists dedicated to the Aboriginal cause. One particular visitor in August of 1969 would change this trend by causing major ripples in the Australian media and leading Black Power to be discussed in the greater Australian public.

August 1969-Roosevelt Brown’s Visit To Victoria

Although he spent only three days in Australia, Bermudan parliamentarian Roosevelt Brown’s August 1969 visit to Melbourne caused controversy that would far outlast his stay. Brown, the chairman of the Caribbean and Latin America Continuation Central Planning Committee of the Black Power movement, had come to meet some of the younger members of the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 253.

⁴¹ *Churinga*, February 1968. New National Group Urged For Aborigines, signed by Pastor Doug Nicholls (Victoria), Maude Tongarie (South Australia), Charles Perkins (Sydney) in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus

and to learn more about the Australian Aboriginal population. He took interest in the population after hearing a radio interview on Aboriginal affairs that had been sent to the Caribbean Black Power Conference by an Australian DJ earlier in the year. Though initially to be kept a secret, his visit made national headlines after he held a press conference to inform the Australian public of his visit and “let the black people of Australia know that they [were] not alone.”⁴² The media coverage that followed this press conference highlighted the alarm and fear of white Australia at the notion of a Black Power Movement in Australia. It also revealed a wide range of reactions within the Victorian Aboriginal community to the prospect of an Aboriginal Black Power Movement. Although brief, this singular incident flung “Black Power” into public discourse, especially in the state of Victoria. It also led to a period of heated debate in the Victorian Aborigines’ Advancement League (VAAL) about the role of whites in the organization.

Dr. Roosevelt Brown⁴³ is remembered in Australia, if known at all, as the man who spurred the “Black Power Scare” of 1969. However, Brown was a major civil rights activist in Bermuda who had served as chairman of the Committee on Universal Adult Suffrage in the nation in the early 1960s and also as a United Nations Development Officer⁴⁴. Brown had experienced his fair share of racism, not only in Bermuda, but in the deep South of the United States where he had been dragged behind a car “driven by Ku Klux Klan members who disliked his Black Power

⁴² Mitchell, Neil. “Pastor Nicholls hits at Black Power.” The Age. 29 August 1969. Original clipping may be found at: <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history/1960s/aalbp/rb6.html>

⁴³ Known later in life as Dr. Pauulu Kamarakafego

⁴⁴ Dale, Amanda S. “Dr. Pauulu Kamarakafego fondly rememebered.” The Royal Gazette. April 5, 2007. <http://www.royalgazette.com/siftology.royalgazette/Article/article.jsp?sectionId=60&articleId=7d742cb30030002>

activities.”⁴⁵ At a funeral service for Brown, a UN colleague described him as a man determined to work for and with underprivileged groups around the world, saying that he would “be long remembered as one who brought light into some of the most isolated places in the world.”⁴⁶

During Brown’s trip, VAAL President Bob Maza and liaison officer Bruce McGuinness hosted him. As Maza and McGuinness showed Brown around the city, the three “talked and discussed a great deal.” By the end of Brown’s trip, Maza wrote in the *Koorier*, “I can assure you much has come out of our discussion.”⁴⁷ Upon observing the treatment of Aboriginal people in Melbourne, Dr. Brown offered the professional aid and moral support of Black Power Movement colleagues in the Americas to the members of the Victorian AAL. Asked about whether he thought violence should be used as leverage for Aboriginal rights in Australia, Brown said at his press conference:

“I would not be arrogant enough to tell the Australian aboriginals what is best for them...But they can get personal and professional help from the Black Power Movement in the Americans if they seek it... Some of the world’s greatest legal minds would be available to Australian aboriginals if they needed them in legal battles—such as the struggles for land rights.”⁴⁸

At the press conference, Brown stirred up a storm of dissent. Pastor Doug Nicholls of the Aboriginal Church of Christ in Fitzroy, also a director of the Victorian AAL, argued angrily with Dr. Brown. He told Brown, “You cannot make statements

⁴⁵ “Black Power help offer.” *The Age*. 28 August 1969.

⁴⁶ Dale, Amanda S. “The Nelson Mandela of the Caribbean.” *The Royal Gazette*. April 21, 2007. <http://www.royalgazette.com/siftology.royalgazette/Article/article.jsp?sectionId=60&articleId=7d74aab3003000b>

⁴⁷ Maza, Bob. *The Koorier*. Vol. 1, No. 9, August 1969. printed in *For the Record: 160 Years of Aboriginal Print Journalism* (Editor: Michael Rose), p. 70

⁴⁸ “Black Power help offer.” *The Age*. 28 August 1969.

about the aboriginal people without having talked to them,” to which Brown responded, “I have been talking to some, but I don’t have time to see everyone.”⁴⁹

Nicholls, who had not been informed that Brown would be visiting, believed that there was “no place in Australia for any Black Power Movement.”⁵⁰ He, along with a contingent of other Aboriginal people in the city at the time, felt that Black Power was an imported ideology. Nicholls later wrote that he found the ideology of Black Power totally unrelated to the tradition of Aboriginal activism and leadership of the earlier generations such as William Cooper, William Ferguson and Bill Onus⁵¹.

The media rejected Brown and his ideas. An Adelaide newspaper called Brown “the most unwelcome visitor Australia has had for a long time.” The Daily Mirror, a Sydney newspaper ensured its readers that Aboriginal people did not want Black Power, and wrote “Get out, Mr Brown!”⁵² Despite the fact that Dr. Brown did not advocate mass uprising or violence to the Aboriginal people, the media portrayed his brand of Black Power as a dangerous movement that would lead to violent outbursts across Australia. Scenes of violence spurred by the Black Power Movement in the United States had undoubtedly gained more media attention in Australia than some of the more subtle themes of Black Nationalism and empowerment that lay behind Black Power rhetoric. After Brown’s visit, the Australian media perpetuated these oversimplifications of Black Power by calling Brown “an inciter of ‘racial violence... frenzied hate, knifings, shootings, torture, sudden death and sickening

⁴⁹ Hawkins, Trevor. “Pastor Clashes with Black Power Man.” The Sun. 29 August, 1969.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Lothian, Kathy. “A Blackward Step Is A Forward Step.” Unpublished masters thesis, Department of History, Monash, Australia. 2002.

⁵² Ibid.

fears.”⁵³. Nevertheless, some journalists saw a possibility of Black Power without bloodshed. A November article in *The Age* reported, “Most Aborigines in Victoria would probably reject the violence and separatism that has become a feature of overseas Black Power movements. But a minority is at least actively pressing for greater control of organizations that shape their future.”⁵⁴

Directly following Brown’s trip, Bruce McGuinness expressed frustration at the views of Black Power as a violent ideology. In an interview with *The Age*, he argued:

“People are scared of Black Power because they don’t know enough about it...All they know is what they read in the Press and that’s only street fighting and violence...What you don’t hear about is their help to underdeveloped countries to lift their economic standards when governments aren’t doing it.”

Looking past the media’s obsession with Black Power violence, McGuinness said, “Australian Aborigines want to know what’s going on in the Black Power Movement.”⁵⁵

However, the negative reactions to Brown’s visit proved fierce. Many objectors to Dr. Brown’s views wished to know who had invited the visitor. McGuinness accepted the blame for inviting Brown, saying “This man is great and I tried to make him welcome.”⁵⁶ However, McGuinness had a hard time handling the backlash for his invitation. Two weeks later, after receiving “numerous threatening and abusive telephone calls and letters,” McGuinness told the press that Brown’s visit was “an accident,” emphasizing that the visitor was “uninvited” and had come to the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Richardson, Michael. “\$40,000—and Black Power fears.” *The Age*. 1 November 1969.

⁵⁵ “Aboriginal Invited Black Power Man ‘Because He Is Great’” *The Age*. 30 August 1969.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

country of his own volition⁵⁷. Not wanting VAAL President Bob Maza to be blamed for the visit, McGuinness said that he had taken responsibility for inviting Brown instead.

In spite of the fact that the media and certain Aboriginal people did not agree with Brown's rhetoric or his visit, just a day after the end of his trip, VAAL issued a statement expressing their acceptance of Black Power. In the statement, the League made it clear that they supported Black Power "without necessarily condoning all the ways by which it expresses itself in various parts of the world, or indeed, in Australia."⁵⁸ They emphasized a definition of Black Power which called on Aboriginal Australians to work together as a political interest group. The statement identified several recent incidences, including the takeover of the 1969 FCAATSI conference and the 1968 formation of the Victorian Aboriginal Tribal Council, as demonstrations of Black Power. Moreover, the League expressed a mutual agreement between white and Aboriginal members that non-Aboriginal members would "stand back" and allow their Koori peers "to tell the League what it should be"⁵⁹. Thus, while the statement encouraged collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members for implementation of VAAL decisions, it also acknowledged that Aboriginal people should take the lead in decision-making.

After the statement was issued, many of the members of VAAL became impatient, wanting more control for as Aboriginal people as soon as possible. In September, after an all-Aboriginal meeting of League, a committee headed by Bob

⁵⁷ "Black Power leader 'uninvited'." *The Age*. 11 October 1969.

⁵⁸ Victorian Aborigines Advancement League, Statement on Black Power, 1969 printed in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus, p. 243

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Maza, Henry Penrith and Geraldine Briggs put forward a new resolution to depose all white leaders of the organization and replace them with Aboriginal leadership⁶⁰. A heated debate ensued. During the following weeks, Maza and Penrith rallied for support of the new Black Power initiative. Infuriated at the turn towards exclusively Aboriginal leadership, Pastor Doug Nicholls resigned from his directorship position. McGuinness, stung by the backlash of the media, now agreed with Nicholls that to try to pass such a resolution would alienate white supporters and limit the efficacy of the organization. Headlines in Australian newspapers sensationalized the debate, announcing that the conflict “could destroy the Aboriginal Advancement League.”⁶¹

The League voted on the resolution in November. Before the vote, Bob Maza vehemently addressed the assembly, wearing a Black Power button that had been given to him by members of the Canadian Black Power movement⁶². The scene resembled a meeting that had occurred many miles away in 1966, when black American members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee convened to vote on a similar resolution to kick out white members. However, unlike the outcome of SNCC meeting, this resolution did not pass. At the end of the meeting, the majority of VAAL members voted that white members should stay.

While the resolution to force all white VAAL members from their positions did not pass, in the following months, many white members began to step down. In the words, of Kathy Lothian, “[W]hites were astute enough to see time had come to

⁶⁰ Lothian, Kathy. “A Blackward Step Is A Forward Step.” Unpublished masters thesis, Department of History, Monash, Australia. 2002. p. 49*

⁶¹ “A.A.L. leaders split on race.” The Sunday Observer. 16 November 1969.

⁶² “Night of Black Power Failure.” The Age. 29 November 1969.

move aside.” As a result, within a few years, the AAL had “entirely black control.” For Victorians, Roosevelt Brown’s visit led to the beginning of a new period of activism—a period during which fiery young Aboriginal activists like Bob Maza would say the Black Power Movement in Melbourne occurred. However, different catalysts set off the movement for Aboriginal youth in Redfern and Brisbane as the 1970s neared, including communication between young activists in different cities, the events at the 1969 Easter FCAATSI conference, a continual stream of information on the Black Power movements in the Americas, and encounters with visitors from these movements.

Aftermath of the ‘Takeover’: The 1970 FCAATSI Meeting

By the next Easter FCAATSI conference in 1970, the debate that had taken over the VAAL had been brought to discussion in the Federal Council. Barry Pittock, a white man who had traveled to America and met with both Native and African Americans, issued the motion to prohibit white leadership in FCAATSI. According to Kathy Lothian, “he had a very good understanding of what Black Power meant and was very supportive of it.” Indeed, it was Pittock’s definition of the ideology that the VAAL published in their statement on Black Power of 1969. He said that Black Power was the idea “that black people are more likely to achieve freedom and justice for themselves by working together as a group, pursuing their goals by the same processes of democratic action as any other common-interest pressure group such as

returned servicemen or chambers of commerce.”⁶³ Pittock defended his proposal with an article entitled ‘Why I believe only Aborigines and Islanders should decide FCAATSI polices’ to which a group of five Aboriginal and Islander leaders responded with ‘Why we believe that Aborigines and Islanders should have allies in their fight for rights and advancement’. While Pittock argued that Aborigines were “willing and able” to take control of the organization, the opposing contingent, including past general secretary Dulcie Flower, Harriet Ellis, Faith Bandler, Ken Brindle and Pastor Frank Roberts, complained, “In putting his views before a wide group of people, Dr. Pittock did not consult one Aboriginal or Islanders Member of the Fccatsi [sic] Executive. He may be falling into the trap he warns Aborigines and Islanders about—paternalism!”⁶⁴ Their response continued by asserting that FCAATSI had always focused on “uniting the greatest number of white organisations with aboriginal and islander organizations to win the demands of the rights and advancement of the movement.”⁶⁵

The issue broke FCAATSI into a number of factions, each fighting passionately for their position on the new proposal. At the end of the second day of the conference, the votes came in. Taffe writes that the vote was tied, 48-48, but “due to the disorder by this time” the final tally may not have been accurate.⁶⁶ Either way,

⁶³ Dr. Barrie Pittock, quoted by the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League, Statement on Black Power, 1969 printed in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus, p. 243

⁶⁴ Dulcie Flower, Harriet Ellis, Faith Bandler, Ken Brindle, and Pastor Frank Roberts, ‘Why we believe that Aborigines and Islanders should have allies in their fight for rights and advancement’, 1 March 1970 printed in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus, p 244

⁶⁵ Ibid. p 245

⁶⁶ Taffe, Sue. *Black and White Together*. St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2005, p 260

the amendment fell very short of the two-thirds majority required for it to pass. Following the decision, a contingent that had supported the motion, led by Pastor Nicholls of Victoria and Kath Walker of Sydney, created a new indigenous-controlled body called the National Tribal Council⁶⁷.

Of the entire debacle, Kathy Lothian notes that out of the “anxiety and mistrust” surrounding the vote, an “enormous amount of hurt [was] created.” Soon after, Barrie Pittock resigned from his executive position in FCAATSI. Taffe believes that “[t]his rift marked the effective end of the Federal Council as a body that brought together diverse representatives from all over the country.”⁶⁸ Pat Turner, now the CEO of National Indigenous Television recalls:

“In the last few years I was Vice President, and I was firm that there would be no white people on the board. Whites could come to our meetings but they were supporters and it was up to us to make decisions and take agenda forward.”

By the end of the 1970s, the organization had fallen into the hands of indigenous leaders like Turner, who believed much less in multiracial control of the Council.

Uneasy Responses to Black Power in the Aboriginal Community

The fate of FCAATSI following the 1970 split set the tone for the next decade, as many Aboriginal organizations shifted towards indigenous control and self-determination. However, the events at the conference also reflected the fickle views that many indigenous leaders held towards Black Power early in the decade. For example, Pastor Doug Nicholls, a fierce opponent of Black Power following the

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Roosevelt Brown incident, led the coalition of FCAATSI members who formed the National Tribal Council in 1970. It may seem ironic that a leader who had been so vehemently anti-Black Power in the 1969 VAAL debates played such a prominent role in the formation of one of the first national Aboriginal organizations created on the basis of Black Power ideology. However, although younger colleagues like Bruce McGuinness called Aboriginal self-determination “Black Power,” it is not clear that Nicholls would have.

In fact, Nicholls was a staunch supporter of increased self-determination for Aboriginal people. He had been campaigning for a new FCAATSI that would better represent Aboriginal people and their interests since the early 1960s. The manifesto of his newly created National Tribal Council stated, “We stand for self-reliance...We depend on our own efforts, on the united stance of our own people.”⁶⁹ Many of the leaders of the emerging Black Power movement would call this statement a representation of Black Power, and in the following years would work alongside, and sometimes in the Tribal Council for improved “Federal Responsibility and Action,” “Land and Mineral Rights,” “Education,” “Consultation and Power,” “Legal Aid and Protection,” “Health,” “Employment,” “Cultural Pluralism,” “Freedom from Prejudice and Discrimination” and “Justice and the Rule of Law” as demanded by the 1970 NTC manifesto⁷⁰.

Moreover, Nicholls had demonstrated an acceptance of African American visitors that came before Roosevelt Brown. It must not be forgotten that it was Pastor

⁶⁹ National Tribal Council, Policy Manifesto, adopted 13 September 1970 as printed in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus, p 246

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Nicholls' church that welcomed numerous African Americans throughout the 1960s. However, as explained to the VAAL in 1969, he supported the legacy of "great Aboriginal leaders" who "never looked beyond their own states nor did they look for leaders from outside Australia to lead them in the many problems as were in those early days."⁷¹ Although many of the young leaders adopting it saw Black Power as a call towards Aboriginal self-determination, Nicholls viewed it as turning away from the Aboriginal community for answers. Moreover, many of the younger activists embracing this ideology had rather radical, and sometimes even violent, ways of expressing their methods—especially as the 1970s continued. Nevertheless, a turn towards Black Power by some of Nicholls' colleagues helped to bring about the shift towards Aboriginal community-control that Nicholls had worked so hard for in earlier years. It must also be said that his and other older Aboriginal leaders' years of working towards greater Aboriginal control of organizations helped create to a place for Black Power in the 1970s.

Bruce McGuinness appeared particularly fickle during the early years of the Black Power movement in Victoria. Without a doubt, he played one of the leading roles in bringing the movement to the city of Melbourne. He acted as a leader of the rising movement in 1968 and 1969, avidly reading materials from America and organizing Dr. Roosevelt Brown's visit. However, smarting from the invective he received after taking responsibility for Brown's trip, he appeared to change his stance towards Black Power in the later months of 1969. By November 1969, he lamented that "black power' moves in Melbourne had produced disastrous effects" to the

⁷¹ Lothian, Kathy. "A Blackward Step Is A Forward Step." Unpublished masters thesis, Department of History, Monash, Australia. 2002. p. 53

press⁷². Moreover, McGuinness spent the months of the VAAL debate trying to convince members that abandoning white support would greatly hamper the advancement of Aboriginal rights, and he threatened to resign from the organization if the motion to expel whites passed⁷³.

However, by the Easter FCAATSI conference of 1970, McGuinness had taken the side of those pushing for all-Aboriginal control. In fact, a Victorian newspaper reported in June 1970 that McGuinness “resigned from the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines when it refused to bar white people from its committee.”⁷⁴ McGuinness indicated that his ideas had changed “dramatically overnight” due to a trip to Brisbane, where an unfamiliar bombardment of racism convinced him that Black Power might be needed in some regions of Australia. In a 1970 article for the *Koorier*, he expressed feelings that since the situation of Aboriginal people in different Australian states significantly varied, each state required different political methods when advocating on the behalf of Aboriginal people.⁷⁵

Victoria was generally considered the least oppressive Australian state in terms of Aboriginal treatment. During the aftermath of Roosevelt Brown’s visit, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs Ray Meagher said that “of all the states, Victoria had the least cause for a Black Power upsurge.” However, he reasoned that “Because Victoria is

⁷² “Black Power Move ‘Unwise’.” *The Australian*. 15 November 1969.

⁷³ Lothian, Kathy. “A Blackward Step Is A Forward Step.” Unpublished masters thesis, Department of History, Monash, Australia. 2002. p. 54; “Night of Black Power Failure.” *The Age*. 29 November 1969.

⁷⁴ “Bruce hits the headlines over ‘Black Power’.” *Northcote Leader*. 17 June 1970.

⁷⁵ McGuinness, Bruce. *The Koorier*. Vol. 1, No. 13, 1970 as printed in *For the Record* (Ed. Michael Rose), p 71

the furthest advanced, it is also the most vulnerable.”⁷⁶ Catholic newspaper The Advocate explained to its white readership, who, “looking at the Aboriginal situation, is apt to insist on how much better things are than they were” that despite ‘progress’ since the 1930s, Aboriginal people in Victoria dealt with “poverty, sickness, squalor and degradation...and the high walls of discrimination still to be climbed”⁷⁷. While McGuinness expressed a willingness to work with the whites of Victoria towards Aboriginal advancement, his trip to Brisbane made him less optimistic for his fellow Aboriginal activists in Queensland. Referring to the apartheid-system in South Africa, Bobbi Sykes once claimed, “Queensland is a little South Africa, with a similar mentality. But you can’t say that is so in Victoria... In Queensland the people are being forcibly, systematically oppressed. For economic motives, for power motives and things like this.”⁷⁸ Such an oppressive system is most probably the reason that a much more militant form of Black Power, and a chapter of Black Panthers, arose in Brisbane in the mid-1970s. McGuinness felt that a strong coalition of Aboriginal supporters across Australia would help Kooris in the more oppressive states to fight against their racist environments.

Bruce McGuinness’ change of mind after visiting Queensland demonstrates how an increasing pan-Aboriginal consciousness at the advent of the 1970s set the mood for an Aboriginal Black Power network. By June of 1970, he defined Black Power as “the right of Aborigines to control their own affairs but to get to this goal

⁷⁶ “‘Hot-Head’ Blast on Black Power.” The Sun. 1 September 1969.

⁷⁷ “Aborigines and Black Power.” The Advocate. 4 September 1969.

⁷⁸ Bobbi Sykes as quoted by Kevin Gilbert, *Because A White Man’ll Never Do It*, p. 37

with the help, support and goodwill of the European community.”⁷⁹ McGuinness emphasized the importance of Black Power, which he seemed to characterize more broadly as Aboriginal unity, on the national level to work in states like Queensland. In the Koorier article marking his change in viewpoints, he wrote, “I feel that on a National scale, the answer is Black Power. It is the only thing that can draw our people together, but we must never alienate ourselves from the main source of support that is white sympathetic followers of the black man”⁸⁰. His relationship with Black Power between 1968 and 1970 exemplifies the ways that young Aboriginal activists in the 1970s explored various meanings of Black Power, attempting to fit them into their own doctrines for Aboriginal rights. According to different situations, the definition and the ways to advocate for Black Power changed for these young activists. Sol

Bellar later explained this phenomenon well:

“There was the Back to Africa movement by Black Americans, Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, the Nation of Islam, Martin Luther King—and they all had an impact. You could sit back and judge from an Australian point of view which way to take it. According to your own personal constitution, you went with the best way to follow, and molded all [these philosophies] into each other.”

Taking into consideration all of the information that they had learned from international movements, young activists who came to know the different situations that local and national Aboriginal people had to deal with could apply foreign tactics accordingly.

⁷⁹ “Bruce hits the headlines over ‘Black Power’.” *Northcote Leader*. 17 June 1970.

⁸⁰ McGuinness, Bruce. *The Koorier*. Vol. 1, No. 13, 1970 as printed in *For the Record* (Ed. Michael Rose), p 71



Bob Maza (left) and Dr. Roosevelt Brown (right) take questions during the only conference during Brown's visit.

Source: Gary Foley, The Koori History Website, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history/1960s/aalbp/rbdx.html>

WHY NOT BROWN POWER?

In October 1971, Bobbi Sykes, a prominent activist in the Australian Black Power movement, wrote an article entitled "Parallels" for *Identity* magazine. It began by stating, "Australians are making a grave error when they draw comparisons between the American Negro and their own Aborigines. No areas of similarity exist between the conditions or treatment by white people of the two races, and the only thing they hold in common is the obvious one—their coloured skin."⁸¹ The article went on to explain that, while "the Negro has been treated with cruelty and all manner of atrocities perpetrated against him," Aboriginal people shared a much more similar history of dispossession and abuse with "American Indians."

⁸¹ Sykes, Roberta. "Parallels." *Identity Magazine*. Vol 1, No 2, October 1971. printed in *For the Record* (Ed. Michael Rose), p 130-132

Four years later in 1975, Sykes published a debate with Neville Bonner, another prominent Aboriginal Australian, about the role of Black Power in Australia.

In it, she wrote:

“While the Land Rights claim and the Cultural and Language questions remain purely indigenous issues, the whole spectrum of racist practices has been directed at anyone not bearing a white skin and it can be no surprise that on these common issues, all non-whites will be inclined to work together...In an effort to elevate the broad black struggle being undertaken here to a Third World level, use of the word ‘black’ becomes highly desirable... ‘Black’ is more than a colour, it is also a state of mind.”⁸²

Hence, between 1971 and 1975, Sykes’ rhetoric underwent a tremendous change; indeed, it was emblematic of a change in the way that many young Kooris self-identified. This shift in understanding of the relationship between the position of Aboriginal people in Australia and the position of other black people in their day-to-day setting, a key motivator of the Black Power Movement in Australia, allowed Aboriginal people and African Americans to pursue coalition-based activism to improve conditions for both groups in the 1970s.

By 1975, Sykes’ focus had shifted from the outward appearance of African Americans and Aboriginal Australians as ‘black’ to a more psychological identification based on real-world experience with racism. Her new position revealed a deeper understanding of the “broad black struggle” encountered by black people in America and the Third World; and this is probably a result of the studies of international movements undertaken by her and her peers. During the 1975 debate, her opponent Neville Bonner challenged:

⁸² Bonner, Neville and Bobbi Sykes. *Black Power in Australia*. South Yarra, VIC: Heinmann Educational Australia Pty Ltd, 1975. p 11-12

“There is a similarity between the plight of the American Negro and the Australian Aborigine: they are both clearly identifiable, disadvantaged minorities in an advanced technological society, but that is just as far as the similarity extends. There are plenty of peoples in this category, many of them such as the American Indians, the Ainu in Japan, the Jews, and other minority groups in the Soviet Union, not black. In many cases the majority is not European either.”⁸³

While Bonner acknowledged that both the groups had been disadvantaged, he appeared not to notice the similarities between the experiences of Aboriginal and African American people as clearly as did Sykes and her contemporaries.

Gary Foley explains, as if in response to Bonner, why the specific experiences that Aboriginal people shared with other groups mattered significantly to him and his colleagues. These younger activists argued that not only had both Kooris and African Americans been disadvantaged, but they had been disadvantaged *in similar ways*, thus producing mutual understanding between the two groups. In a personal interview, Foley said that young Kooris accepting Black Power “weren’t interested in the racial origins of people,” but instead “in the ideas emerging.” After reading books that revealed the reality of life in black American neighborhoods, these Kooris “looked around Black Melbourne and... Redfern, the black ghetto of Sydney” and they saw “what we regarded as identical things happening in our midst.”⁸⁴ Because of the familiarity of stories about urban African American life, these Aboriginal activists found it fitting to incorporate Black Power into their own political movement.

Foley’s explanation helps to explain Sykes’ assertion that “black is a state of mind” by referring to the parallels between urban, black American and Australian

⁸³ Ibid. p 68-69

⁸⁴ Foley, Gary. Personal Interview. 13 August, 2007.

experiences. However, it does not fully explain the Aboriginal move towards Black Power in the 1970s. By calling the use of the term 'Black Power' "highly desirable," Sykes reveals a strategic Aboriginal usage of the term to connect the Australian movement to revolutions of black peoples around the world. In a 1971 interview with one newspaper, Foley admitted that "Aboriginals identified with the American Indian. But they took the American name Black Panther for the glamour surrounding it."⁸⁵ Hence, it must be acknowledged that Aboriginal activists turned towards Black Power, to some degree, because of the excitement that the phrase carried with it. It is true that these activist lacked access to a wide body of Native American literature. But it is also true (and perhaps an explanation of the dearth of political material available) that the Native American struggle during the 1960s and 70s had been largely overshadowed by U.S. public sensation over Civil Rights and Black Power. By creating a Black Power movement in Australia, Aboriginal youth could borrow the publicity that American Black Power activists had mustered. Indeed, though Koori activists made links with both Native and African American leaders during their movement, the Australian public took much greater interest in their ties to American Black Power⁸⁶.

Most white Australians reacted with fear. Sol Bellear reasons that Aboriginal claims to "blackness" caused them greater dismay than claims to being "coloured" or "brown" would have caused.

⁸⁵ "Simon Townsend Talks To The Leaders of the Black Panthers." *The Australian*. 5 December 1971 printed in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus, p 256

⁸⁶ To clarify, Aboriginal people in Australia have been called "black" since the arrival of white colonizers. Thus, self-identification as "black people" or "blackfellas" was not new to this group. However, Aboriginal Australians had never tied the title of "black" so directly to black people in the Americas before the Black Power movement.

“They don’t want to know that Black Power was here in Australia. They’d be out to have called it brown power...people wanted it that way. It’s that integrating down of color. It’s okay to be brown. If you’re black, stay back. If you’re brown, stick around.”⁸⁷

Indeed, arguing against Black Power, Bonner referred to the “ideological and emotional attachment” of the phrase, whose “effect...on the white population is an overwhelmingly negative one.”⁸⁸ Gary Williams added in an interview, “all you had to do was say it and people started freaking out, really.” Yet rather than shy away from an identity that would cause uneasiness in white Australia, the young activists of the 1970s sought it. These Black Power activists took advantage of the apprehension of whites to make them listen. Lamenting that a lack of political capital and access to media made Aboriginal people in the 1970s “basically defenseless,” Foley said that young Kooris had “no way to be heard unless we resorted to shock tactics.”⁸⁹ Once given the media attention that they sought, Black Power activists were better able to address both the government and the greater Australian public.

Because Aboriginal Black Power activists took on the characteristic look of Black Power activists in America, many historians have accused them of simply copying the American movement. File footage of the era reveals a “black leather jacket fixation,” a large number of Afros, and many Aboriginal people sporting black berets in the 1970s. Foley says that people adopted this style of clothing “because it had such a dramatic impact on white Australia.”⁹⁰ The closer Black Power activists in Australia could come in appearance to American Black Power militants, the greater

⁸⁷ Belleair, Sol. Personal interview. 25 August, 2007.

⁸⁸ Bonner, Neville and Bobbi Sykes. *Black Power in Australia*. South Yarra, VIC: Heinmann Educational Australia Pty Ltd, 1975.p 39-40

⁸⁹ Foley, Gary. Personal interview. 13 August, 2007.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

the fear they instilled in the Australian public. Aboriginal activists also took on the slang of their American counterparts; they used terms like “Uncle Toms” for Kooris they felt had betrayed their blackness and “pigs” for police. But since “Australia was already in the process of being...Americanized,” Foley argues, the Australian media was “desperate at times that there should be an Australian version of things they were writing about in America.” He and his peers’ new costumes helped them to play the role of the American militant more convincingly. And seeing a mirror image of the militants from America in their own front lawn did just what these Aboriginal youth wanted it to: it frightened them.

Nonetheless, the Black Power movement was not all about appearances. Kathy Lothian warns that there was “no wholesale adoption of what was happening in the U.S.” The most common demands during public protests of the decade were for land rights—something that the American militants had not protested for. Land rights activism during the Black Power Movement in Australia stands out as one of the ways that Aboriginal activists manipulated the Black Power ideology to address their own needs.

Many Aboriginal Black Power militants heightened public fears by threatening violence in order to leverage their demands. Denis Walker, one of the most revolutionary Aboriginal Black Power activists and leader of the Black Panthers in Brisbane, once claimed the right to carry guns at a press conference. “Everyone has a right to defend themselves against an aggressive enemy,” he declared.⁹¹ Notwithstanding this claim, guns were not a prominent feature of the Aboriginal Black

⁹¹ Denis Walker in *N'ingla A-na*, 1972

Power movement. Moreover, in December 1971, Redfern activists including Paul Coe and Gary Foley warned that they were “going to train a select group on urban guerilla tactics and use of explosives.”⁹² Yet overall, while the threats caused serious alarm, the amount of violence involved in the Aboriginal movement paled in comparison to the violence involved with the movement in the U.S.

When violence did break out during the movement, it was relatively minor. In November 1971, a Brisbane demonstration led by Walker broke out due to a new law called the Queensland Act. Armed with bare fists, stones and garden stakes, one to two hundred Aboriginal protestors took to the streets⁹³. Though Denis Walker’s form of Black Power was undoubtedly considered the most violent, its ‘violent’ nature made a less lasting impact upon the Aboriginal population of Brisbane than did its political re-education and community uplift programs. Even so, the unpredictable personalities and wild threats of leaders like Walker made Australian authorities uneasy: by the end of the decade, nearly all Aboriginal leaders of the Black Power movement had been profiled and followed by ASIO (the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation). The level of attention paid to these Black Power advocates by the governmental intelligence agency confirms the potential threat the Australian government felt from these urban Aboriginal activists.

Aboriginal Black Power activists used Black Power as a double-edged sword in their fight to improve the lives of Aboriginal people in Australia. On one hand,

⁹² “Simon Townsend Talks To The Leaders of the Black Panthers.” *The Australian*. 5 December 1971 printed in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus, p 254

⁹³ Lothian, Kathy. “A Blackward Step Is A Forward Step.” Unpublished masters thesis, Department of History, Monash, Australia. 2002. p 80-81

they used the fear created by threats of violence and media hype to bring attention to issues that they needed the public's help to address. On the other hand, they took away an emphasis on self-determination from the literature that they read; and they used this emphasis to create new community-controlled programs. Most members of the Australian public did not understand that Black Power reached deeper than violence and shock tactics. Nevertheless, throughout the movement Aboriginal activists applied the ideas that international Black Power movements had given them to the community projects that they spearheaded. Thus, both the shock factor and the rhetoric of self-determination worked hand in hand to create changes for Aboriginal people during the Black Power movement.

Breaking Ground

Several other aspects of early Australian Black Power made it particularly shocking to whites. First, the Black Power movement marked the first time that Australia had seen large numbers of urban Aboriginal people gathering to protest for their rights. As noted by Kevin Gilbert, "There was...as late as the 'sixties, no 'Aboriginal movement'" to speak of. At the end of the 1960s "you could only get two blacks involved" in public outcry; but by the early 1970s, "when you ask[ed] blacks to move on a certain issue, you [could] get a heap of them."⁹⁴ As Aboriginal protesters took to the streets, they proved to the greater public that they were ready to support

⁹⁴ Gilbert, Kevin. *Because A White Man'll Never Do It*. p 31-32

their claims in large numbers. The notion that fiery leaders such as Paul Coe and Denis Walker had united under a common Black Power flag and could bring a large mob of followers from each of several cities to bear on local and national government must have caused wide concern for public officials.

Secondly, the Black Power Movement came as a surprise to many white Australians who, as late as 1968, were sure that Black Power would not work in Australia. In April 1968, Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins and Minister of Aboriginal Affairs Ray Meagher debated publicly about the probability of Black Power hitting the streets of Australia⁹⁵. Until VAAL issued its 1969 statement, white Aboriginal Affairs ministers (such as Meagher and Charles Wentworth) scoffed to the press when asked about the possibility of Aboriginal people accepting Black Power ideas. As the events of late 1969 and early 1970 unfolded, these officials saw how wrong they had been.

Finally, with the onslaught of an Aboriginal Black Power movement, Australian government had to worry about foreign pressure to improve life for its Aboriginal people. In his 1969 *Koorier* article on Roosevelt Brown, Bob Maza threatened that, since “the Black Nations throughout the whole of the world” had taken up support of Aboriginal Australians, foreign Black Power leaders would “be fully informed of what the white government is doing to the black man of this land.”⁹⁶ Already wary of the Black Power militants in America from afar, threats that the

⁹⁵ “He Fears ‘Black Power’.” *The Herald*. 27 August 1968.

⁹⁶ Maza, Bob. *The Koorier*. Vol. 1, No. 9, August 1969. printed in *For the Record: 160 Years of Aboriginal Print Journalism* (Editor: Michael Rose), p. 70

government would be held accountable by such international revolutionaries only put more pressure upon Australian officials.



Denis Walker in Brisbane, February 1972.

Source: Bruce McGuinness, Bruce Mac's Place, <http://www.kooriweb.org/bbm/pix/embpix/p58.html>

TRAVELING TO AMERICA

By 1970, each core group of young Kooris in Redfern, Brisbane and Melbourne had begun to organize around Black Power. That August, five delegates from across the country set off on a several month long journey to America to serve as Aboriginal representatives at the Congress of African People in Atlanta, Georgia. The delegates included Bruce McGuinness, Bob Maza and Patsy Kruger from Victoria, Jack Davis of the Council for Aboriginal Advancement in Western Australia⁹⁷, and Sol Bellear, a 19-year-old Sydney University student. The delegation had been invited

⁹⁷ Lothian, Kathy. "A Blackward Step Is A Forward Step." Unpublished masters thesis, Department of History, Monash, Australia. 2002. p. 146

due to contact with Dr. Roosevelt Brown. Sol Bellear says, “It was the first time people from the Asian Pacific basin [Australia, New Zealand, and New Guinea] were invited.”⁹⁸ Delegations from across the United States, the Caribbean and South America, Africa attended, as well.⁹⁹ During the trip, the Aboriginal delegates planned to “study race relations between Negroes, Indians, and Whites.”¹⁰⁰

The Congress of African People (CAP) in 1970 brought together the International Black Conference, organized by Roosevelt Brown, and the U.S. National Conference on Black Power “to draw Black Power groups from the United States and abroad into a coalition.”¹⁰¹ The program was co-chaired by Dr. Roosevelt Brown, representing the International Black Power movement, and Imamu Amiri Baraka, a prominent black nationalist in the United States. During his opening statement, speaker Hayward Henry articulated the conference’s dual themes of “Nationalism and Pan-Africanism,” and put forward “building institutions” as the Congress’ main mission.¹⁰² The conference featured speakers such as Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, Ambassador El Hajj Abdoulaye Touré of Guinea, Julian Bond, and Louis Farrakhan. Moreover, during the Congress, approximately two thousand delegates discussed themes of “Black Technology, Economics, Education, Communications,

⁹⁸ Bellear, Sol. Personal Interview. 25 August, 2007.

⁹⁹ Contee, Clarence G. *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Oct., 1972), p. 441; Morrow, William. *African Congress*. New York, NY: William Morrow & Company, 1972.

¹⁰⁰ “Aborigines to Study in U.S.A.” *The Northcote Leader*. 2 August 1970.

¹⁰¹ Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour*. New York, NY: Henry Hold and Company, 2006. p. 254

¹⁰² Morrow, William. *African Congress*. New York, NY: William Morrow & Company, 1972.

p. 4

Creativity, History, Law & Justice, Community Organization, Political Liberation, Social Organization, [and] Religious Systems.”¹⁰³

During their trip, the Aboriginal delegation met a number of African American leaders including Baraka and Farrakhan. Sol Bellear recalls meeting “movie stars, actors, singers” and “African students, in those days, who are now presidents and prime ministers.” During the Congress, the Kooris had the opportunity to address the other delegates. When they did, says Bellear:

“People didn’t realize [that they had] brothers and sisters in Australia. They said, “Damn, look at this.” We started talking about issues down here. People were saying we were getting the same hell here, that they’re oppressing us too! So then the dialogues started opening up.”¹⁰⁴

Moreover, attending the conference opened up several opportunities for the Aboriginal delegation. After the conference, they lectured at universities and presented two petitions on barriers to Aboriginal rights to the United Nations¹⁰⁵. While in New York, Bellear remembers staying at the three-story apartment owned by Queen Mother Moore in Harlem.

The trip proved to be quite educational for the delegation. However, not all of the delegates felt welcomed by the African Americans that they met. Bruce McGuinness reportedly returned to Australia early, offended by the reluctance of African Americans to recognize him as black due to his physical appearance. In an interview shortly before he died, McGuinness said that “being left out of things and not being encouraged to take part in workshops because I was a bit fair skinned and

¹⁰³ Ibid. p ix, Introduction by Amiri Baraka

¹⁰⁴ Bellear, Sol. Personal interview. 25 August, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Lothian, Kathy. “A Blackward Step Is A Forward Step.” Unpublished masters thesis, Department of History, Monash, Australia. 2002. p.148

straight haired” hurt.¹⁰⁶ Conversely, Sol Bellear’s kinky hair and dark skin helped him to fit into the crowd—until his accent gave him away. Bellear recalls the amusement of black people in Harlem when they heard him speak, and says they would give him books to read so that they could hear his accent: “They used to say ‘You a funny-ass, funny-talkin nigger!’” These differences affected the way that each of the delegates experienced their trip, and they each returned to Australia having learnt their own lessons.

Through a series of events that he did not fully explain, Sol Bellear, the youngest delegate, extended his trip for over twelve months before he returned to Australia. During this time, Bellear was smuggled from location to location in the States through remnants of the U.S. Black Panther network. During the year that he spent in America, Bellear claims that he was “photographed and tailed by the Australian Police.” However, one of the people hosting him “had a brother in intelligence side of things,” and he informed Bellear when he was at risk of being deported. In a personal interview, Bellear revealed:

“They had an underground way of dealing with people who were political activists and prisoners. I was taken around in the dead of night and survived like that. People would go out and raise funds [or] talk at rallies at midnight in churches. The plate went around, and that’s how I survived.”

Nevertheless, during his extended stay, Bellear learned a great deal from the Panthers that assisted him. He took special note of the ways that these people took care to provide for their communities, observing the community programs employed by members of the Black Panther Party. Moreover, he spent time with the Seminole

¹⁰⁶ Rennie-Gwaybilla. “The Dr. Bruce Mac Interview.” Bruce Mac essays and other writing. 2003. p. 2

Native Americans, learning “how Native Americans put things together on a reservation, set up colleges” and maneuvered economic endeavors such as “bingo halls and casinos.”¹⁰⁷

The trip helped to strengthen connections between the Australian Black Power movement and Black Power movements around the rest of the world. It especially affected the relationship between Aboriginal and African American activists. Upon their return, delegates used their new contacts and knowledge to improve the efficacy of the Australian Black Power movement. For example, Belleair helped to implement self-help programs in Sydney such as the Breakfast for Children program, which he had seen Black Panthers in the U.S. administer, and the Aboriginal Housing Companies. Referring to these self-help programs and way that the Black Power movement mobilized young Kooris, Gary Williams says, “I think that’s what we’ll be remembered by instead of the rhetoric.”¹⁰⁸ Likewise, because Black Power was “never understood by whites but often not understood by Aboriginal people either,” activist Jacqui Katona agrees that “Black Power in Australia became known because of the action of Black people” and “not because of its underlying critique and understanding.”¹⁰⁹ Definitely, these community survival programs have far out-lived the Black Power movement. They remain today as some of most lasting impacts of the movement upon urban—and now even rural—Aboriginal life.

¹⁰⁷ Belleair, Sol. Personal interview. 25 August, 2007.

¹⁰⁸ Williams, Gary. Personal interview. 19 August, 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Katona, Jacqui. Personal interview. 18 August, 2007.



Bruce McGuinness (left), Patsy Kruger (center) and Sol Bellear (right) with an American friend during their trip to the USA.

Source: Gary Foley, The Koori History Website, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history/1970s/ustrip/p6.html>

MANIFESTATIONS OF BLACK POWER IN AUSTRALIA

Redfern Black Power activists created the first of several community self-help programs, the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS), in 1971. As mentioned earlier, many urban Kooris struggled against fierce police brutality. On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, officers would wait outside of the only bar in Sydney that allowed Aboriginal patrons, located at the Empress hotel. In the words of Sol Bellear, “They’d

come at closing time, take you to the police station, give you a bash, and when you got to court you weren't allowed a lawyer." As a result, the young Black Power activists in Redfern decided that something had to be done. The tactics of Oakland Black Panthers guided these Aboriginal activists in their efforts to address police brutality. As told by Gary Foley, "[Paul] Coe said to us one day to consider the idea of what the Panthers were doing in Oakland. Their response to it was find out you can carry a gun and do what they called Pig Patrol." The activists originally aimed to emulate the Panthers' method of arming themselves to deter the police from brutality. However, they could not find any loopholes in the New South Wales laws that would allow them to carry guns. Instead, Coe, Foley and Williams decided to monitor police activity on bar nights by collecting information. "Our Pig Patrol consisted of me and Gary Williams and Paul Coe and a few of the others following the cops around Redfern or at the Empress Hotel," said Foley. "We used to be there armed with pen and paper."¹¹⁰ Within a few weeks, the group had "accumulated an enormous amount of incriminating evidence of Aboriginal people being arrested, beaten up, and taken away on spurious charges."¹¹¹ When these youth presented their findings to Professor Hal Wooten, of the University of New South Wales Law Faculty, he was incredulous. It took a trip to the Empress Hotel one night so that he might witness the events in order to convince him that they were telling the truth. Even then, though ready to help them, Wooten did not know what to do to address the situation. Gary Foley remembers that, once again, the young Coe looked towards American activists for an answer:

¹¹⁰ Foley, Gary. Personal interview. 13 August, 2007.

¹¹¹ Lothian, Kathy. Personal interview. 14 August, 2007.

“Coe said, ‘I’ve read in America they’ve got these free shopfront legal aid centers with volunteers.’ So Coe said to Professor Wooten, ‘Help us recruit lawyers and we’ll set up a free shopfront legal aid center.’ And six months later, not even that, in Redfern, we opened up the doors of the first ever free shopfront legal aid center in Australia. It was staffed by volunteer white lawyers, young white lawyers, some of these lawyers have now gone on to become chief judges and people throughout Australia.”

The community organization required the help of a white staff because at the time “there were no Aboriginal lawyers, none, in Australia.”¹¹²

Thus, out of an idea spurred by the American Black Panther’s Pig Patrol, the Aboriginal Legal Service was formed. The story of the Service’s creation demonstrates the way in which the Aboriginal activists transformed international Black Power ideas to fit their own needs and make them pertinent to the Aboriginal community.

Community Controlled Self-Help Programs

The Aboriginal Legal Service came as the first of a series of community programs put in to place by Black Power activists in the early 1970s. While the legal and medical services originated in Redfern, they quickly spread to other cities around Australia. At the same time, the Black Panther Party in Brisbane instituted a number of independent community programs aimed at social uplift.

The community programs created in the 1970s greatly impacted the legal status and health of many Aboriginal people, as government studies as early as the mid-

¹¹² Foley, Gary. Personal interview. 13 August, 2007.

1970s reluctantly admitted.¹¹³ Radical Brisbane leader Denis Walker argued that the programs were essential to Aboriginal survival given the “genocide” that white settlers had wreaked upon Aboriginal people for the past 200 years.¹¹⁴

The programs acted on one of the main tenets of Black Power for Aboriginal activists in the 1970s—“self determination through community control.” The concept’s basic premise, that “any attempt to alleviate the problems of [a] community will fail unless elected representatives of that community are the people who decide priorities and control programs, resource allocation and policy implementation”¹¹⁵, adheres strongly to Carmichael and Hamilton’s call to “think of the black community as a base of organization to control institutions in that community.”¹¹⁶ Using this principle of self-help, Aboriginal Black Power activists focused on improving the social problems facing the urban communities that they lived in. Moreover, in creating these survival programs, activists like Paul Coe infused their new Black Power ideas with traditional Aboriginal values like communal living. Coe charismatically rallied the Redfern community, saying:

“[W]e can develop communities where black people, through their old tribal kinship sort of beliefs, attitudes, we can bring out black communities where the black people themselves are the ones who

¹¹³ Foley, Gary. “Aboriginal Medical Services Cooperative Ltd-Redfern, A Political History.” *Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service 20th Anniversary Book*. Sydney: Aboriginal Medical Service Cooperative, 1991. p. 6

¹¹⁴ Denis Walker in *N’ingla A-na*, 1972

¹¹⁵ Foley, Gary. “Aboriginal Medical Services Cooperative Ltd-Redfern, A Political History.” *Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service 20th Anniversary Book*. Sydney: Aboriginal Medical Service Cooperative, 1991. p. 6

¹¹⁶ Ture, Kwame and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. New York, NY: Random House, 1967. p. 166

decide what happens to those communities. The ones who bring in the bread, the ones who...take care of the old people, the young people, that we have our own pre-schools and kindergartens.”¹¹⁷

Thus, the Redfern activists created their own brand of Black Power. This new ideology combined rhetoric and methodology from the global movement with community principles upheld by a number of Aboriginal cultures.

UP TO HERE

Redfern Community Control: AMS, Health Services, and Aboriginal Housing Companies

Less than a year after the creation of the Aboriginal Legal Services, Redfern’s Aboriginal activists set out to address the severe health problems of their community. Organizers of the legal services discovered “when going around interviewing people in their houses” that “people were very sick.”¹¹⁸ According to Aboriginal Medical Service CEO, Naomi Mayers, “They needed a medical service, too.” Legal service volunteers found that Aboriginal people would often “literally rather die than be subjected to degrading, humiliating treatment at the hands of non-Aboriginal health workers”¹¹⁹ in Sydney’s hospitals. Indeed, Sol Bellear recounts that “the nurses wouldn’t touch black people...you had to pay \$2 at emergency before you were seen.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Paul Coe, N’ingla A-na, 1972

¹¹⁸ Mayers, Naomi. Personal interview. 25 August, 2007.

¹¹⁹ Foley, Gary. “Aboriginal Medical Services Cooperative Ltd-Redfern, A Political History.” *Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service 20th Anniversary Book*. Sydney: Aboriginal Medical Service Cooperative, 1991. p. 5

¹²⁰ Bellear, Sol. Personal interview. 25 August, 2007.

To address the problem, a committee of concerned community leaders set up the Aboriginal Medical Service Co-operative Ltd (AMS) in July 1971¹²¹. Gary Foley, who wrote the political history of the AMS twenty years later, says the service “started off as a shopfront clinic with a volunteer Aboriginal nurse, a volunteer shop doctor [a white professor named Fred Hollows], and a volunteer Aboriginal secretary.” The AMS, now a “multi-million dollar operation” funded by the Australian government, stood as a precursor to the 139 Aboriginal health services existing across the country today.

Through the Medical Service, Redfern activists implemented several more community programs that they had learned from the Black Panthers in America. The first of the programs, the fresh fruit and vegetable run, later “expanded into a comprehensive nutrition program”¹²². Next, a group of young Aboriginal activists including Sol Belleair and Paul Coe decided to emulate the Black Panthers’ Breakfast for Kids program. According to Gary Foley, “Coe went to talk to a famous chef in King’s Cross and talked him into letting us borrow the mobile kitchen. And so we parked this caravan kitchen in Newtown one day, next to Redfern, and got all the people to donate food.” Though Foley described the days spent feeding the children as “chaos,” the program successfully addressed the hunger and poor nutrition of Redfern children. A group of women from the Black Power Movement later took control of the program and incorporated it into the Murawina Aboriginal Women and

¹²¹ Foley, Gary. “Aboriginal Medical Services Cooperative Ltd-Redfern, A Political History.” *Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service 20th Anniversary Book*. Sydney: Aboriginal Medical Service Cooperative, 1991. p. 5

¹²² Ibid. p. 6.

Children's Centre¹²³, a community center based on the Black Panther's babysitting programs.

Next, in late 1972 another group of activists set up the Aboriginal Housing Companies (AHC). The Companies addressed the needs of a significant number of Aboriginal Sydney residents squatting in empty real estate in order to survive. The Housing Companies bought and renovated Sydney real estate for unsheltered Kooris in Sydney. Bob Bellear¹²⁴, a member of the AHC committee, proposed that "improved living conditions [would] eventuate the restoration of dignity, improve health conditions in the older people as well as the young, upgrade the low education standards obvious in a lot of the children," and also offer administrative and construction jobs to the unemployed¹²⁵. This organization demonstrated, once more, the dedication of Black Power activists in the 1970s to efforts to improve the conditions of Aboriginal communities.

Brisbane Black Panther Party Programs

Redfern was not the only city where community survival programs went into action. The Black Panther Party of Australia in Brisbane put together several programs of its own to deal with the issues affecting local Aboriginal communities. A "Platform and Programme" of the Panthers in 1970 detailed the Party's call for better employment opportunities, housing, land and mineral rights, exemption from military service, ending police brutality, release of imprisoned Kooris from jail, a new system

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Bob Bellear was Sol Bellear's brother.

¹²⁵ Bellear, Robert W. *Black Housing Book*. Sydney, NSW: 1975. p. 8

of court procedure and a number of other demands¹²⁶. Former co-leader of the Party Sam Watson expressed during an interview that the Panthers “attended courts and monitored arrest and incarceration rates.”¹²⁷ The Brisbane Panthers also put on “monetary programs” and “programs to monitor police activity,” much like the activists in Redfern.

The ideals of community control that permeated the Black Power Movement of Redfern and Brisbane affected cities across Australia. By the end of the decade, an impressive number of legal, medical, and housing services had spread to many urban Australian areas. Despite constant challenges, including suspicion from the government and a consistent struggle to find and maintain financial support, the majority of these services have catered to the needs of Aboriginal communities around Australia for over 30 years.

The Renaissance of Black Arts

The Black Power era also engendered an artistic renaissance within urban Aboriginal centers. Especially in the areas of performance and writing, the feeling that “Black is beautiful” permeated artistic work produced in the period. This led to the creation of the National Black Theatre (NBT), directed by prominent Black Power activist Bob Maza. Maza based the theater upon the National Black Theater in Harlem, which he and his Aboriginal delegates had visited during their trip to America.

¹²⁶ Black Panthers of Australia. “Platform and Programme.” 1970 as printed in *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* by Bain Atwood and Andrew Markus, p. 252

¹²⁷ Watson, Sam. Personal interview. 17 August, 2007.

In the early 1970s, after visiting Australia with a traveling dance troupe, Carole Y. Johnson moved to Sydney. At the time, Johnson was a young African American woman looking for an environment where “she could grow more as a dancer.” In Sydney, the Julliard-trained dancer set up the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme (AISDS), where she trained the first ever professional company of Aboriginal dancers. Johnson identified the Aboriginal Australians as another group of “black people who had been oppressed and repressed,” and taught them to use performance to “express themselves in relation to social and political issues.”¹²⁸

According to Northern Territory activist Jacqui Katona, the renaissance of public performances, film and music in the Black Power era was important because in indigenous art, “our values weren’t being filtered through the Western viewpoint.”¹²⁹

Both The National Black Theater and the AISDS set the stage for a vibrant Aboriginal arts community that continues to use the stage as a platform for political and social commentary. Neither of the two institutions still exists. However, the NBT created actors and directors that would achieve national and international fame. Moreover, the AISDS served as a foundation for two of the most prominent indigenous dance companies in Australia today.

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy

¹²⁸ Gatzke, Gary. “Dance Pioneer Down Under.” The Juilliard School Alumni News. September 2004.

¹²⁹ Katona, Jacqui. Personal interview. 18 August, 2007.

The most original of all Black Power projects, and one of the greatest events in Australian political history, began as a much smaller protest outside the lawns of Parliament in Canberra in early 1972. Through a series of fortuitous events for the activists, the protest expanded into a six-month occupation of Parliament lawns that activists called the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. Because Aboriginal Black Power activists could not get away with carrying guns like the American Black Panthers could, Gary Foley says “we had to come up with symbolic means of getting our message across.” The Embassy materialized out of Black Power claims for “land rights now!”

A series of lands rights protests in 1971 put the Australian Prime Minister, William McMahon, on the defensive. On the anniversary of European colonization in Australia, which Gary Foley calls “a controversial day” for Aboriginal people, McMahon announced a new government policy, which opposed the recommendation of the Council of Aboriginal Affairs to grant Aboriginal people land rights. Aboriginal activists were incensed by the Prime Minister’s speech, and they decided to take action. **At first, the Redfern activists acted locally by having a rally outside of the New South Wales Parliament House. However, according to Gary Williams:**

“At about 2am we realized we’d have to go to Canberra. In the rain that night we called for volunteers. Four youngfellas put their hands up and we set about trying to get some money for transport for them... We thought they’d last a couple of hours, and got a supporter who gave them some plastic to keep them from the weather and a big beach umbrella and they sat on the grass in front of parliament house and

waited for the police to come pick them up. We said, ‘Try to get some press before they put you in the wagon!’”¹³⁰

As the four protestors expected, the police soon came to check out the situation. However, there was nothing that the officers could do! Unbeknownst to the organizers, the militants had found a loophole in Australian law: any grouping of less than eleven tents in a public area was allowed under the law. However, as Foley says, “More than eleven tents were deemed a camping area, to be taken away by the police.” The protestors quickly took advantage of this rule, and set up exactly eleven tents on the Parliament lawns.¹³¹

Since they argued that the Australian government did not fairly represent the interests of the Aboriginal people, the protestors named the camp the “Aboriginal Embassy.” They said that this “embassy” would ensure representation at Parliament for Australian’s indigenous population. Aboriginal people from around Australia soon came to Canberra to take part in the protest. Those who had to work during the week often visited the Embassy on weekends.

The protestors soon attracted international attention. Gary Williams remembers that “Japanese tourists came and the story reached Japanese television.” The Parliament quickly became embarrassed by the spectacle. As international guests, including the president of Indonesia and the Queen of England, visited the Parliament, they were met by hordes of “scruffy Aborigines camping on the Parliament lawn.” In June 1972, six months after the Embassy had been erected, the government took

¹³⁰ Williams, Gary. Personal interview. 19 August, 2007.

¹³¹ Foley, Gary. “Aboriginal Medical Services Cooperative Ltd-Redfern, A Political History.” *Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service 20th Anniversary Book*. Sydney: Aboriginal Medical Service Cooperative, 1991. p. 9

action. They created a new law against camping on the Parliament lawn, and “ten minutes later,” as Gary Foley tells the story, “they came in and kicked the hell out of the embassy.” Nevertheless, the government was further embarrassed when images of the crackdown appeared in international newscasts.¹³² The protesters re-created their camp three times, and each time, the government cleared them off of the lawns.

With the Aboriginal Embassy, Black Power activists from around Australia united to show the Australian government that they were ready for change in the conservative policies of the day. In the end, the activists conveyed their message: they would no longer tolerate the conservative land rights policies of the McMahon government. In a landslide national election some months after the events at the Embassy, Geoff Whitlam’s new executive replaced the conservative McMahon administration. Foley, and many other historians, say that the Embassy “helped to end 23 years of conservative government in Australia.”¹³³

The protest challenged white society’s views of Black Power. As articulated by Gary Foley:

“All the whites in my generation saw Black Power as equaling violence. Violence is the big thing. They said, ‘We don’t mind you all holding demonstrations as long as you conduct yourselves within the law.’ And that was the beauty of the Aboriginal embassy: they couldn’t say anything about it...We made a point of saying 1) this is a peaceful demonstration and 2) we are within the law. It was perfectly legal.” Moreover, Koori Black Power activists demonstrated through the Embassy that, instead of relying solely upon Black Power tactics borrowed from abroad, they could put Black Power ideology to use in creative new ways.

¹³² Foley, Gary. Personal interview. 13 August, 2007.

¹³³ Ibid.

Through the international media that publicized the Aboriginal Embassy, Aboriginal Australians introduced themselves to the world as an innovative and proactive political group. Redfern activist Paul Coe goes as far to say that the Embassy affected significant indigenous movements in the United States, calling the American Indian Movement's 1973 siege at Wounded Knee "an extension of what we were doing in Canberra." With the Tent Embassy, a more independent Aboriginal liberation struggle emerged, proving that these militants were ready to serve as examples for the rest of the world to follow.



Aboriginal Embassy staff educates a group of visitors about their protest.

Source: Gary Foley, The Koori History Website, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history/1970s/emb72/mac/p14.html>

EFFECTS OF BLACK POWER IN AUSTRALIA

The Aboriginal Embassy served as one of the last Aboriginal protests considered a part of the Australian Black Power Movement. Though the tradition of Aboriginal activism continued, the change in government marked the beginning of a new era in Australian indigenous political history. Brisbane's Sam Watson recalls that when the Whitlam government came into power, "ninety-five percent of black political leadership went into public service positions." As a result, he said, "the heat went out of people."¹³⁴ It had been a struggle to come up with the money to fund the various community programs, but a more liberal government allowed the majority of these institutions to acquire federal funding. As the 1970s progressed, the Aboriginal movement gradually lost all explicit associations to Black Power.

While the movement has ended, its legacy continues. The ideals of community uplift inspired by American Black Panther programs live on through the social services created during the Black Power era in Australia. Furthermore, the spirit of activism sparked by Black Power activists in the late 1960s inspired a continuum of lands rights activism through the 1980s that eventually won the landmark Land Rights Act in 1992. Perhaps the most significant effect of the Black Power movement in Australia was the extent to which it transformed Aboriginal self-perceptions and empowered a strong indigenous voice in national politics. As noted by historian Kathy Lothian, "the writings of Black Americans [during the Black Power period in the US] enriched the reflections of Aborigines on their own society, worked to

¹³⁴ Watson, Sam. Personal interview. 17 August, 2007.

stimulate pride in Aboriginality, and offered useful strategies for combating oppression”¹³⁵. Furthermore, Black Power activism elicited more radical forms of activism than had existed previously, allowing “Aborigines [to prove] to themselves that they could ‘stand up and fight.’”¹³⁶ Indeed, the movement helped Aboriginal people in Australia to establish themselves as a forceful political interest group to the wider public.

In order to attain land rights and to put an end to the destructive physical, psychological and civil abuses inflicted upon Aboriginal people across Australia, Black Power called for community control and self-determination. In this way it challenged more than 200 years of white involvement in Aboriginal affairs—from vagrant mistreatment during colonization to an era of grandfatherly monitoring by the Aborigines Protection Board to well-intentioned participation in the civil rights-focused FCAATSI.

Furthermore, the Black Power era in Australia gave rise to one of the most important institutions in the history of Aboriginal politics, the Aboriginal Embassy. Originally set up for six months in 1972 as an eleven-tent political protest on the lawns of the National Parliament, the Aboriginal Embassy became an embodiment of Aboriginal political representation. When, thrice in 1972, armies of police crushed the tent embassy and beat its members, international media revealed the extent of the Aboriginal liberation struggle to people around the world.

It is important to consider that many of the Aboriginal leaders still prominent in Australian politics today became politically active during the Black Power era. In

¹³⁵ Lothian, Kathy. “Seizing the Time.” p. 184

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 197

terms of its ideological reach, the movement was widely accepted by an entire generation of urban Aboriginal activists. As a result, many of the Aboriginal leaders of today developed their political leadership based upon Black Power ideology. Because of a considerable failure to transfer indigenous leadership to a younger generation, the extent to which Black Power ideology continues to motivate Aboriginal leadership is substantial.

Outside of its national impacts, the Aboriginal Black Power movement manifested a connection to Black peoples around the world. Contact between Aboriginal Australians and members of the African Diaspora during the late 1960s and early 1970s encouraged Koori activists in their endeavors to improve live for Aboriginal people. A significant visit occurred in 1969, when the West-Indian Black Power activist, Roosevelt Brown, came to lend his support to the Victorian Aboriginal Advancement League. In response, white Australians stirred up controversy, writing newspaper articles expressing fear and disapproval of the new Black Power ideology that he advocated. Then between 1970 and 1971, a delegation from the AAL traveled to Atlanta meet with American Black Panthers, and to New York to visit inner-city schools and communities. Through this visit, the Australian delegation and the Black Americans that they encountered came to better realize the similarity of their struggles and aims.

The extent to which racism and inequality dominate in Australian society, politics, and government today is overwhelming. In my opinion, greater attention to the plight of Aboriginal Australians must be paid by international groups. Because of the historical ties between Aboriginal peoples and black peoples around the world,

members of the African Diaspora should be aware and informed of Aboriginal political history and of the continuing fight for justice that Aboriginal people face.

Of the struggle of African Americans in the 1960s and 1970s, Sydney Black Power activist Sol Bellear says, “You have Aboriginal people who have seen what you’ve done, and you’ve made a contribution that should be recognized.” But many of the relationships between Aboriginal Australians and black activists in other parts of the world have faded in the last thirty years. Despite a fierce spirit of activism since the 1970s, Aboriginal communities still struggle with a number of serious problems. Across urban Australia today, Aboriginal and pro-Aboriginal activists rally together to end Aboriginal deaths in police custody, to eliminate the 17-year gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and White Australians, and to continue to encourage Aboriginal community control, self-esteem, and socio-economic improvement. In more rural areas, Aboriginal people cannot yet dedicate their energies to fighting such large-scale issues as the ones being addressed in larger cities—many instead seek daily to withstand an ever-preset atmosphere of rural racism. Because many black peoples around the world face similar issues, this study is relevant and important to the greater body of global black studies and contemporary world politics. Perhaps it is time that historically marginalized groups in America and around the world renew their contact with Aboriginal Australia and work to improve conditions for this population today.

REFERENCES

- “A.A.L. leaders split on race.” *The Sunday Observer*. 16 November 1969.
- “Aboriginal Invited Black Power Man ‘Because He Is Great’” *The Age*. 30 August 1969.
- “Aborigines and Black Power.” *The Advocate*. 4 September 1969.
- “Aborigines to Study in U.S.A.” *The Northcote Leader*. 2 August 1970.
- Bellar, Sol. Personal interview. 25 August, 2007.
- “Black Power help offer.” *The Age*. 28 August 1969.
- “Black Power leader ‘uninvited’.” *The Age*. 11 October 1969.
- “Black Power Move ‘Unwise’.” *The Australian*. 15 November 1969.
- Bonner, Neville and Bobbi Sykes. *Black Power in Australia*. South Yarra, VIC: Heinmann Educational Australia Pty Ltd, 1975.
- “Bruce hits the headlines over ‘Black Power’.” *Northcote Leader*. 17 June 1970.
- Cavadini, Alessandro [director]. *N’ingla A-na*. 1972. Videocassette, 90 min.
- Coe, Paul. Personal interview. 22 August 2007.
- Contee, Clarence G. *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 57, No. 4. Oct 1972.
- Curthoys, Ann. “The Freedom Ride—Its Significance Today.” National Institute for the Humanities Public Lecture. 4 September 2002.
- Dale, Amanda S. “Dr. Pauulu Kamarakafego fondly rememebered.” *The Royal Gazette*. April 5, 2007.
<http://www.royalgazette.com/siftology.royalgazette/Article/article.jsp?sectionId=60&articleId=7d742cb30030002>
- Dale, Amanda S. “The Nelson Mandela of the Caribbean.” *The Royal Gazette*. April 21, 2007. <http://www.royalgazette.com/siftology.royalgazette/Article/article.jsp?sectionId=60&articleId=7d74aab3003000b>
- Edwards, Kutcha. Personal interview. 10 August, 2007.
- Ervin, Lorenzo Komboa. “First Report on Australia from Bro. Komboa.” E-mail to Marpessa Kupendua. 31 July, 1997.

- Fletcher, Karen. "Sam Watson: a life-long fighter against racism." 19 September 2001. Green Left Online. <http://www.greenleft.org.au/2001/465/25170>. Accessed 20 February 2008.
- Foley, Gary. "Aboriginal Medical Services Cooperative Ltd-Redfern, A Political History." *Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service 20th Anniversary Book*. Sydney: Aboriginal Medical Service Cooperative, 1991.
- Foley, Gary. "Black Power in Redfern, 1968-1972." Unpublished bachelor's (honors) thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, Australia. 5 October 2001.
- Foley, Gary. "International Influences on the Australian Indigenous Resistance." PowerPoint Presentation for *Australia Now*, Australian Centre, University of Melbourne. 30 March 2006.
- Foley, Gary. Interview with Mammad Aidani. "In Conversation with Gary Foley." La Mama Theatre, Melbourne, Australia. 14 August 2007.
- Foley, Gary. Personal interview. 13 August, 2007.
- Gatzke, Gary. "Dance Pioneer Down Under." The Juilliard School Alumni News. September 2004.
- Gilbert, Kevin. *Because a White Man'll Never Do It*. Sydney, NSW: A & R Classics, 1973.
- Hagan, Stephen. Personal interview. 16 August, 2007.
- Hawkins, Trevor. "Pastor Clashes with Black Power Man." The Sun. 29 August, 1969.
- "He Fears 'Black Power'." The Herald. 27 August 1968.
- "'Hot-Head' Blast on Black Power." The Sun. 1 September 1969.
- Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour*. New York, NY: Henry Hold and Company, 2006.
- Katona, Jacqui. Personal interview. 18 August, 2007.
- Lawrie, Rowena. "Speak Out Speak Strong: Rising Imprisonment Rates of Aboriginal Women." *Indigenous Law Bulletin* (Vol 24). 2003.
- Lothian, Kathy. "A Blackward Step Is A Forward Step." Unpublished masters thesis, Department of History, Monash, Australia. 2002.
- Lothian, Kathy. Personal interview. 14 August, 2007.
- Lothian, Kathy. "Seizing the Time: Australian Aborigines and the Influence of the Black Panther Party, 1969-1972." *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol 35, No. 179. Sage Publications, 2005. <http://jbs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/35/4/179>

- Mayers, Naomi. Personal interview. 25 August, 2007.
- Morrow, William. *African Congress*. New York, NY: William Morrow & Company, 1972.
- Muecke, Stephen and Adam Shoemaker. *Aboriginal Australians: First Nations of an Ancient Continent*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- “Night of Black Power Failure.” *The Age*. 29 November 1969.
- “Pacific Island Labourers Act,” 1901. National Archives of Australia.
<http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item.asp?dID=15>
- Penrith, Aletha. Personal interview. 25 August, 2007.
- Rennie-Gwaybilla, Reko. “The Dr. Bruce Mac Interview.” *Bruce Mac essays and other writing*. 2003.
- Richardson, Michael. “\$40,000—and Black Power fears.” *The Age*. 1 November 1969.
- Rose, Michael (editor). *For the Record: 160 Years of Aboriginal Print Journalism*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996.
- State Records Authority of New South Wales. “Guide to Aboriginal Records.” Sydney, NSW: Government of New South Wales, 1998.
- Sykes, Roberta. *Snake Cradle*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1997.
- Taffe, Sue. *Black and White Together*. St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2005.
- The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Government Printer, Canberra, 1901.
- “The population census - a brief history.” *1301.0 - Year Book Australia, 2005*. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005). Retrieved 30 May 2008.
- Ture, Kwame and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. New York, NY: Random House, 1967.
- Turner, Pat. Personal interview. 22 August, 2007.
- Vamplew, Wray (editor). *Australians: Historical Statistics*. Broadway, New South Wales, Australia: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987.
- Watson, Sam. Personal interview. 17 August, 2007.
- Williams, Gary. Personal interview. 19 August, 2007.