

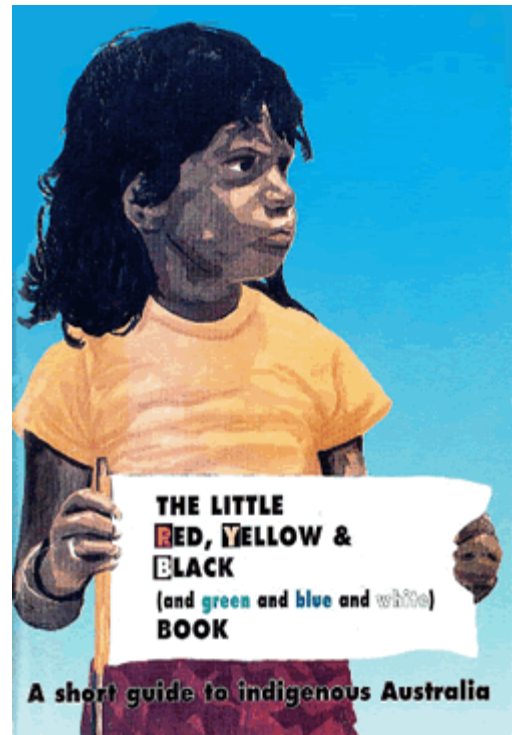
## Selected extracts from *The Little Red Yellow and Black (and green and blue and white) Book*

### NOT PASSING THROUGH

Since 1788, the newcomers to our county have often assumed that indigenous peoples' cultures and societies were worthless, because their efforts to understand us were too superficial. The impressions they gained were those of tourists passing through – not those of neighbours.

As Australians begin to see themselves as part of the Asian and Pacific regions rather than as a satellite suburb of Europe, they are also seeing the first Australians through new eyes.

Sometimes non-Aboriginal people get confused by the great range and variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from the traditional hunter to the Doctor of Philosophy; from the dark skinned to the very fair; from the speaker of traditional languages to the radio announcer who speaks the Queens English. The lesson to be learned from this is that we should not stereotype people; that people are different, regardless of race.



Our people, of course, did not use the word 'Aborigine' (from the Latin *ab origine* 'from the beginning') to refer to ourselves before the coming of the non-Aborigines. Everyone was simply a person, and each language had its own word for person. Different groups of people distinguished one another in different contexts by different names (by their language, their country etc). Since 1770 words meaning 'person' in traditional languages (such as Yolngu, Yapa, Koori and Murri) have been used by English speakers to refer to Aboriginal people from specific language groups.

### OUR LAND IS OUR LIFE

Our rights in land are hereditary and are shaped by complex social processes based on traditional principals of descent, kinship and marriage.

Estates or 'countries' are each held corporately by a group of Aboriginal people who have certain rights and responsibilities in relation to the land. They enjoy the right to live off the resources of the land and to deny or grant permission to other people to enter and use the country.

The land holding group has the collective responsibility to 'look after' the country by keeping out intruders, maintaining sacred sites, and performing traditional ceremonies to ensure the countries continuing identity and fertility.

Senior knowledgeable members of the group share the leadership in exercising these responsibilities. The members of each group regard each other as family and are descended from a common ancestor or ancestors. These ancestors are also the characters celebrated in religious ceremonies whose exploits created the natural and social features of the world.

*Bill Jonas, Marcia Langton and AIATSIS.*

*Published by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies © 1994 on behalf of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.*