Race and Reconciliation in Australia

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Abstract
Like the children and young people in the vignette above, Indigenous people throughout Australia are making lives for themselves while facing complex challenges, from practical considerations such as trying to stay alive longer and attain a decent standard of living, to questions about their identities and relationships with other Australians. Understanding the position of Indigenous people in contemporary Australia requires some knowledge of the past and the way in which the past continues to influence subsequent generations of people. Race and reconciliation are integral to this understanding. Theories of race, once fixed, have become more complex; invalid biological and ‘science’-based frameworks have been replaced by theories focusing on the multiple social meanings of race and race relations. These have implicitly framed the development of policies addressing Indigenous disadvantage, from the earliest attempts to ‘protect’ Indigenous people by forcing them into missions and reserves, to the current mainstreaming of services and challenges to communal land title. The notion of reconciliation—the bringing together of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—encourages us to think about the practical and symbolic dimensions of the past and present and what is required to address persistent inequality.

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Curtin University would like to pay our respect to the indigenous members of our community by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which the Bentley Campus is located, the Wadjuk people of the Nyungar Nation; and on our Kalgoorlie Campus, the Wongutha people of the North-Eastern Goldfields.

Watch our traditional Aboriginal welcome

Plotting Australian reconciliation on the ‘spectrum of conflict handling mechanisms’. In essence, the Australian conflict between the Indigenous minority and the non-Indigenous majority is played out in political and social arenas to rectify the historical elimination and contemporary denial of Indigenous rights and freedoms. It is this definition of Australian conflict that is used throughout this chapter.