

The Aboriginal History Project

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The Argus

MELBOURNE

"I am in the place where I am demanded of conscience to speak the truth, and therefore the truth I speak, impugn it whose list."

MONDAY, JANUARY 17, 1938.

ABORIGINES' PROTEST

Fair-minded Australians will welcome such an expression of opinion as that contained in the manifesto issued by the Aborigines' Progressive Association a few days ago. While they will not agree with all the sentiments expressed in that mournful and critical utterance, issued designedly as a counterblast to the rejoicings of the white race on the eve of the 150th anniversary of the occupation of Australia by white men, they will acknowledge that there is a good deal of truth in the aborigines' indictment of their fair-skinned supplanters.

The white race has not carried out conscientiously and efficiently its moral obligation to the aboriginal inhabitants of Australia. If it had done so the black population would not have dwindled from its estimated numbers of a century and a half ago—about 150,000—to the scant 60,000 of to-day, and there would not be such a relatively substantial half-caste population. But other claims contained in the manifesto will not withstand critical examination. The demand for intermarriage with the white race is definitely inadmissible. From the practical viewpoint, only the dregs of the white race would consider such a union, and the inevitable result would be the breeding of a race of half-bloods and quarter-bloods who would be undesirable on grounds other than colour.

Moreover, one of the arguments advanced for intermarriage—that aborigines can be absorbed into the white race within three generations without fear of a "throwback"—is illogical. If that were so the aborigines would face extinction

so the aborigines would face extinction as a race, a fate which no race welcomes. The manifesto describes as "a scientific lie" the classification of aborigines as a naturally backward and low race. Unfortunately for the self-esteem of many worthy survivors of a dying people, it is the simple, self-evident truth. The Australian aboriginal culture belongs to a very early stage of mankind's development. Aborigines, in spite of their occupation for untold generations of a favoured land, had not at the advent of the white man advanced beyond the stage of being nomadic hunters. Their implements and weapons were most primitive. Agriculture, one of the earliest phases of civilisation, was to them an unknown art. Their scant numbers scattered over a vast area of the earth's surface did not indicate any desire or ability to occupy their heritage effectively.

The aborigines, despite their spokesmen's vehement denial of racial or cultural inferiority, cannot be treated as a modern civilised race. They are properly regarded as a dying relic of a dead past, and as such should be treated with the broadest tolerance and humanity. The myalls should be segregated, with adequate protection from external interference, and allowed to live out the kind of existence which they obviously desire. Those whose contact with white civilisation has been such as to unfit them for the ancient tribal life should have suitable opportunities for living useful lives. It should not be beyond the wit of white administrators to devise an appropriate policy.

The present plight of the aborigines affords a striking example of a truth which has been pitilessly taught all through human history, and is still being taught to-day—that a race which aspires to the occupancy of a desirable portion of the earth's surface must substantiate its claim. It can do so only by effectively occupying its territory and by effectively defending it against aggressors when the occasion arises. The pathetic cry of the dispossessed aborigines to-day contains a significant lesson for Australians. Their grandsires wrested Australia from its black owners by a right which is tacitly