

Historians & Truth Telling

Sunday 10 November 2019

2:00pm – 5:30pm

Theatre, State Library of WA

Hosted by History Council of WA and Reconciliation WA



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2:00	Introduction	Alan Carter, Reconciliation WA
	Welcome to Country	Sandra Harben
2:15-2:30	The Uluru Meeting	David Collard
2:30- 3:30	Historians before Uluru	Jenny Gregory, History Council of WA
	Truth Telling: an historian's view	Ann Curthoys
	Tokol - talking straight history	John Maynard
	Q & A	
3:30-4:00	Afternoon tea	
4:00-5:00	Truth Telling Panel	Jenny Gregory, History Council of WA
	Storytelling and Makarrata	Elfie Shiosaki
	Uluru and Wadjemup	Ezra Jacobs Smith
	Ancient Memories	Aileen Walsh
	Acknowledging Massacres	Chris Owen
	Q & A	
5:00-5:30	Close and wrap up	Kim Scott Fred Chaney

Abstracts

Ann Curthoys, 'Truth Telling: an historian's view'

I will outline my experiences, as a non-Aboriginal historian, with research, writing, and teaching in the field of Aboriginal history since I was an undergraduate student in the 1960s. I will look at some of the landmark works of history produced by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people over the last fifty years, and will talk about some of the issues I faced when writing about the Freedom Ride of 1965, and about government policies, settler attitudes, and Aboriginal responses to colonisation in the nineteenth century. I will ask why, given the extensive body of knowledge about Aboriginal history expressed in books, film, and television, we still find that many people are unaware of that history, cannot acknowledge the destructiveness of colonisation, and see little connection between past events, present concerns, and plans for the future.

John Maynard, 'Tokol - talking straight history'

Tokol is a local Awabakal (Newcastle) word recorded by the missionary Threlkeld in the years 1821-1850 meaning - truth, to be true, straight. In this paper I will analyse some of the untruths, missing and erased aspects of Australian history that impacted upon my young schooling days over sixty years ago. Additionally, I will discuss some of the major historical events, people and places that continue to impact upon the thinking and decisions of modern-day Australia including the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Elfie Shiosaki, 'Aboriginal Storytelling and Makarrata'

Our continent is a place of many Countries and many stories of Country. Aboriginal storytelling is a catalyst for revitalising truth making about our land, Nations and people. This storytelling as a practice of makarrata transforms racialised and colonised discourses about Australian national history and recognises and accounts for the agencies of Aboriginal people to create sovereign futures.

Ezra Jacobs-Smith, 'Uluru and Wadjemup'

In the context of the Uluru Statement, Ezra will provide his perspective as a young Noongar man on the crucial role of truth telling in projects related to the reconciliation of WA's history of Aboriginal incarceration and segregation on Wadjemup/Rottneest Island between 1838-1931.

Aileen Marwung Walsh, 'Ancient Memories'

In recent years scientists have been transforming how Aboriginal oral histories are known. In at least three research projects, some oral histories from different parts of Australia have been proven to be at least 5000 years old. The ageing of these oral histories has profound implications for colonial perspectives of Aboriginal people's knowledge and how they have been sustained and maintained through culture. Although the scientific validation of the ancientness of these memories may be deemed as irrelevant for we Aboriginal people, the fact that knowledge was preserved so truly, that scientists were able to measure them against events on country, means Aboriginal people all over Australia maintained strong, stable societies through culture connected to country for at least 5, 000 years or 15, 000 generations.

Chris Owen, 'Acknowledging Massacres'

The acknowledgement of the manner in which Western Australia was colonised and the effect on Aboriginal people has had a fraught history. The issue of 'massacres' ('punitive expeditions') has dotted the state's history (and Australia in general) from the earliest days of the Swan River Colony and the 'Battle of Pinjarra' in 1834 to the notorious 'Forrest River Massacre' of 1926. In 1834 Governor Stirling openly admitted (and this was published in Perth newspapers) that the only way to pacify the colonised Noongar (who were proclaimed British citizens) was to 'reduce their tribe to weakness' by inflicting 'such acts of decisive severity as will appal them as people'. By 1926 almost the exact same rationale was used to justify the Forrest River killings but it was, by contrast, not publicised and subject to a widespread 'conspiracy of silence' amongst the colonist community. To this day many people deny these events occurred at all. We will hear how these events occurred - through vast and overwhelming evidence.

Biographies

Fred Chaney AO has been involved in Indigenous causes since his student days at UWA (the class of '58) as a private individual, a lawyer, Senator and MP, as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Fraser Government, and post parliament as a Member of the National Native Title Tribunal and after retirement in NGOs providing native title services. He was the first co-chair of Reconciliation Australia and served on the board for 15 years. Since then he has assisted in the formation of Reconciliation WA and serves on its board. He is supporting the proponents of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Coalition of Peak Indigenous organisations in their partnerships with COAG. He believes that historical truth telling has contributed to major changes in the law and policy.

David Collard is a Nyoongar man from the Ballardong Country east of Perth in the dry Wheatbelt land along the Avon River but has ancestors from both Ballardong and Wadjuk. He has worked in Aboriginal affairs for over 30 years and presently works as an Aboriginal Consultant after working across several government agencies at both State and Federal levels. David developed the state-wide Aboriginal National Resource Management pathway for the Aboriginal community to build capacity that will enable the development of economic, social, environmental and cultural projects. The pathway will assist the state government to offer more meaningful opportunities during settlement discussions for native title and also establish long-term sustainability for the land and the people. He is presently working with the South-West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council to develop a regional framework for engagement in NRM, increase Aboriginal participation in regional decision-making and improve project delivery. His work has included developing opportunities for the Aboriginal community in water resource management and south west National Marine Parks management. He has recently completed the Public Sector Management course delivered by Flinders University, adding to his Degree from Curtin University in Social Sciences. He has been on several community committees, was recently appointed WA representative on the National Indigenous Advisory Group of the Forestry Stewardship Council, serves on the Muresk Institute Advisory Committee, the Perth Employment and Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation, and the National Forest Stewardship Council - Indigenous Working Group. David was a representative at the Uluru constitutional convention and a signatory to the Uluru Statement.

Professor Emerita Ann Curthoys is a historian whose publications include work on Aboriginal history, theories of genocide, and truth and fiction in history. As a student she was involved in the Freedom Ride of 1965 in New South Wales and published a book, *Freedom Ride: A Freedomrider Remembers* in 2002. Her other books include (with John Docker) *Is History Fiction?* (2005); (with Ann Genovese and Alexander Reilly) *Rights and Redemption: History, Law, and Indigenous People* (2008); (with Frances Peters-Little and John Docker, eds) *Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia* (2010), and (with Jessie Mitchell) *Taking Liberty: Indigenous Rights and Settler Self-Government in the Australian Colonies, 1830–1890* (2018), recently shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Australian History Award.

Sandra Harben is a Whadjuck/Ballardong Nyungar and has conducted numerous Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremonies for local, state, national and international conferences in Perth. She is a Nyungar language speaker. Her qualifications include a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in Industrial Relations and Geography and a minor in Anthropology and Australian History from the UWA, 1994. She was awarded the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Scholarship, Murdoch University, 2003 and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Overseas Study Award, undertaken at University of Illinois, USA, 1995. Sandra has worked closely with Moodjar Consultancy on projects relating to Nyungar culture and heritage including an Australian Research Grant project related to Nyungar tourism and Nyungar place names in SW Western Australia. She has also completed Nyungar Interpretive studies of Murdoch University and surrounding areas, the City of Perth's Wellington Square Heritage Project, the WA Museum Whadjuck Consultations for the New Museum and the City of Fremantle's Visioning Report for an Aboriginal Cultural Centre. She contributed to the *Ballardong Nyungar Dictionary* (2018) and managed the Kaartdijin Noongar website at the Southwest Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (2013-2015).

Ezra Jacobs-Smith is a Nyoongar, English and Irish man with connections to the Whadjuk, Yued, Ballardong and Wagyl Kaip sub-clans of the Nyoongar Nation. Ezra attended the Perth regional dialogue and the constitutional convention at Uluru in 2017 that led to the creation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Since the release of the Uluru Statement, Ezra has been involved with a group of volunteers working to build awareness and understanding within the Perth community about the reforms called for in the Statement. He is also currently involved in reconciliation projects on Wadjemup /Rottneest Island.

Professor John Maynard is a Worimi Aboriginal man from the Port Stephens region of NSW. He is currently Chair of Aboriginal History at the University of Newcastle and Director of the Purai Global Indigenous History Centre. He has served on numerous organizations and committees including, Deputy Chairperson of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Executive Committee of the Australian Historical Association, NSW History Council, Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC), Australian Research Council (ARC) College of Experts - Deputy Chair Humanities, National Indigenous Research and Knowledge Network (NIRAKN) and a Fulbright Ambassador. He was the recipient of the Aboriginal History (ANU) Stanner Fellowship 1996, the NSW Premiers Indigenous History Fellow 2003, ARC Postdoctoral Fellow 2004, University of Newcastle Researcher of the Year 2008 and 2012 and ANU Allan Martin History Lecturer 2010. In 2014 he was elected a member of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences. He gained his PhD in 2003, examining the rise of early Aboriginal political activism. He has worked with and within many Aboriginal communities, urban, rural and remote. His publications have concentrated on the intersections of Aboriginal political and social history, and the history of Australian race relations. His books, include *Aboriginal Stars of the Turf* (2002/03), *Fight for Liberty and Freedom: The Origins of Australian Aboriginal Activism* (2007), *The Aboriginal Soccer Tribe* (2011/19), *Aborigines and the Sport of Kings* (2013), *True Light and Shade: An Aboriginal Perspective of Joseph Lycett's Art* (2014), *Living with the Locals - Early Indigenous Experience of Indigenous Life* (2016),

Dr Chris Owen is the Acting Battye Historian at the State Library of WA and an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of History at the University of Western Australia. He has been researching Aboriginal history since the late 1990s and worked with Noongar Aboriginal people to establish their native title in the South West of Western Australia. He is the author of *Every Mother's Son is Guilty': Policing the Kimberley Frontier of Western Australia 1882-1905*, Crawley, UWAP, 2016.

Professor Kim Scott is a multi-award winning novelist, having twice won the Miles Franklin Award (for *Benang* and *That Deadman Dance*) among many other Australian literary prizes. His most recent novel is *Taboo* (Picador, 2017). Proud to call himself one among those who call themselves Noongar - the people indigenous to south-western Australia - Kim is also founder and chair of the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Story Project (www.wirlomin.com.au). Kim is currently Professor of Writing in the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University.

Dr Elfie Shiosaki is a Lecturer in Indigenous Rights, Policy and Governance at the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia (UWA). She held a position as an Indigenous Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Centre for Human Rights Education (CHRE) at Curtin University from 2015 to 2018. She is currently a Chief Investigator of an Australian Research Council Discovery Project which identifies the hundreds of letters written by Noongar people in the archive in Western Australia over 100 years between 1860 and 1960, and Editor for Indigenous Writing with *Westerly* magazine. She completed a PhD (Political Science and International Relations) on nation-building in post-conflict societies in 2015.

Aileen Marwung Walsh

Aileen is a Noongar and Ngalia woman currently undertaking a research doctorate on the Aboriginal Deep Past at the Australian National University, after many years of teaching Aboriginal history and Indigenous knowledge at UWA. Aileen's approach to histories is to understand minds; how brains and bodies relate and to understand social and cultural influences on human perceptions and behaviour. Her key areas of interests are Aboriginal history, histories of whiteness - imperial and colonial histories, socio and psycholinguistics and psychohistories.