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‘Kay Whitehead, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander School Teachers and Australian Settler Colonialism: A History’

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Kay Whitehead, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander School Teachers and Australian Settler Colonialism: A History* (Routledge 2026), 224pp. Hardback. A\$260.80 ISBN: 978-1-0324-4105-4.

This book is a thoroughly researched scholarly monograph. The author digs deeply into the stark reality of Australian Settler Colonial historiography, revealing suppressed injustices and systemic racism. It exposes the foundations and establishment of a white teaching profession which refused to view Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as equals, even though they too were considered British subjects. A society based on the intersecting inequalities of class, race, and gender became the new normal.

The standout is the inclusion of lived experience from aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, who were always subordinated, and the deliberate stifling of their aspirations by systemic settler colonialism. This allows the reader to get a feel for how oppressive and regulated every aspect of their lives were, while they negotiated their way through inherent inequalities. They knew that at any time their lives could be turned upside down by policy changes, opportunities could be withdrawn, or they may be moved or transferred at the whim of the Protector and/or the Education Department.

The author expertly transports the reader through the detailed chronological journey of discriminative policies and processes, which differed from State to State. During the Protection era (1883 to 1950s-1960s) the emphasis was segregation on reserves and missions. Segregation was dominated by control of movement and the removal of children for their 'protection'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were treated as a distinct population group. The Protection era gradually shifted to the Assimilation era (1930s to 1960s) where the policy emphasis changed to integration, the movement to housing often on the outskirts of towns. Control was operationalized through welfare systems and child removal was carried out in the interests of assimilation – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were directed to merge into white settler society. In the 1970s assimilation was replaced by policies which professed self-determination. Historical documentation on the complexity of the development of mission and state schools in each State/Territory and how they evolved alongside the status, conditions and male domination of teaching is meticulous.

At every turn during these periods of history the author shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers asserted their agency. If an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person gained a good command of both English and Religion, they could at least, on occasions, have a voice. A good command of settler knowledge served to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait people who used it skillfully to not only learn more about Settler Colonial society, but also to assist their advocacy. Throughout history and to this very day, the agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspiring teachers persevered, and through dogged determination, they continually sought to be considered equals in a settler society built on inequality. What is the relevance of this research now? In the 21st century, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are not part of the Master Narrative, and it was the voice of the privileged conqueror that wrote Australian history. Given the NO result of the 14

October 2023 referendum, this is still the case. The referendum proposed an Indigenous advisory body (known as The Voice) to be included in the Constitution. The referendum did not have bipartisan support. The result was a NO vote nationally and in all 6 States. Conversely, now more than ever, against a backdrop of Reconciliation Action Plans and Decolonisation of Curriculum initiatives, across all levels of education in Australia, this book is key to a new, deeper awareness of Australia's shared true history and the pursuit of truth-telling.

It is a must, especially for educators, historians of education and scholars of Indigenous studies, politics, and Law. This book is highly recommended to those who want to be better informed and wish to educate themselves in the history of education in Australia. The reader is offered a deep dive into history that is unprecedented in detail, therefore the book constitutes an essential text in the history of education in Australia.

The author has skillfully reminded the reader that truth-telling, in this case the true history of education in Australia, needs to not only be acknowledged, but also be accompanied by the realization, that Australia must embrace this country's true history. There is no longer room for silence, resistance or denial.

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