

Editorial

Queensland Review enters its sixth year with a special issue focussing on race. While the rise of Pauline Hanson and One Nation appear to confirm Queensland's reputation as the racially divided 'Deep North' of Australia, it is from Queensland that the most far-reaching challenges to white Australia's complacent sense of itself as the product of settlement rather than invasion have come, through national debates sparked by the Mabo and Wik decisions. As part of its commitment to Reconciliation and to the dissemination of research on anti-racist theory and practice, the Queensland Studies Centre last year held a conference entitled 'Unmasking Whiteness: Race Relations and Reconciliation'. The conference provided the first national forum for whiteness research in Australia, and this issue of *Queensland Review* brings together a collection of articles based on papers delivered at that conference.

Recent debates around native title and immigration demonstrate that race continues to be of central concern to Australian society, even though its presence is not always made explicit. In such debates the category 'race' is reserved for those deemed to be 'Other'; whites as a racial group remain invisible. Although whiteness is a complex and fragmented identity, all white people benefit from racial privilege. Not all white people share equally in these benefits – some are disadvantaged by their class, gender or sexuality – but all receive unearned social benefits as the inheritors of a racially based system of wealth and privilege. In Australia, as in North America, this system is built upon the European invasion of Indigenous lands. The papers in this issue provide critical and analytical understandings of how whiteness is socially constructed and how it underpins racism in Australian society.

Although 'whiteness studies' as a field of academic interest originated in the United States, papers by Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Lillian Holt, and poems by Phillip Bell, reveal that Indigenous Australians have long experienced and theorized whiteness. Aileen Moreton-Robinson is a Goori woman from Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island) who recently became the first Indigenous person to be awarded a PhD from Griffith University; she is now a Lecturer in Women's Studies at Flinders University. In her paper, which originated as one of the two keynote addresses of the conference, Moreton-Robinson argues that in order to resist the hegemony of whiteness and re-organize power relations in Australia, there is a need to deconstruct and racialise whiteness. She also outlines some of the directions that research into whiteness in Australia might take.

Drawing on her own life experiences, Lillian Holt, Director of Melbourne University's Centre for Indigenous Education, exposes ways in which whiteness is used as a racist weapon, and challenges the reader to *feel* as well as *think* about race issues. Although her paper shocked some conference participants, Holt's powerfully evocative exploration of the personal pain caused by racism is a

remarkable gesture of faith in the possibility of Reconciliation. Phillip Bell – a former army officer and brother of writer Jeanie Bell – also speaks from a position which is both personal and political. Bell's poems depict white race privilege as a daily reenactment of the original dispossession of Indigenous people, but at the same time his work testifies to the survival of an unbroken link with pre-invasion Australia. 'Memories of Mine', for example, concludes with the lyrically haunting line: 'my Goorie mob from Gari though slaughtered we survive'.

Karen Brodkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles, delivered the other keynote address of the conference. She begins her paper by asking, 'what can we learn about ending racism by studying it as whiteness?' To answer this question, Brodkin identifies some of the major findings of recent studies of whiteness in the United States, and explores some examples of cross-racial alliances in U.S. labour history. Geoffrey Gray, a Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra, also focusses on racism as whiteness. In his paper he reviews the 1996 federal election and what this meant for Aboriginal affairs, discusses the Coalition's response to Pauline Hanson's racism, and analyses John Howard's conceptualisation of Australian history as a history of white settlement and development which erases Aboriginal people.

The generation of cultural perceptions about race and race relations is also a focus of this issue. Carole Ferrier, Associate Professor of English at the University of Queensland and the editor of *Hecate*, explores the uses of whiteness theory for reading Australian cultural production through a focus on recent writing by Indigenous women, including Queensland writers Melissa Lucashenko and Alexis Wright. Like Brodkin, Ferrier emphasises the importance of bringing class and gender analyses to whiteness studies. Michael Meadows, Senior Lecturer in Journalism at Griffith University, looks at the reporting of recent events in Australia and Canada to compare and contrast the role of the press in these two countries in creating images of Indigenous peoples. He concludes that 'the *omission* of Indigenous voices and perspectives from journalistic accounts offers more powerful support for dominant ideas and assumptions ... than examples of overt racism'. Finally, Fiona Nicoll, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Adelaide, discusses how recent Australian phenomena – such as the rise of Pauline Hanson and the Demidenko-Darville affair – have placed the connection between Anglo-Celticity and tolerance (which underpins Australia's dominant understanding of multiculturalism) under unprecedented strain.

This special issue of *Queensland Review* is the first collection of articles to address whiteness in the Australian context. It is perhaps ironic – but also a hopeful sign – that Queensland, the state from which Pauline Hanson and One Nation emerged, is also leading the way in disseminating new academic work on anti-racist theory and practice.

Belinda McKay