

THE CENTRE: A LIMITED COLONISATION

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ONE-THIRD OF THE Australian continent, covering 2.7 million square kilometres, has so far been largely useless to Europeans because it is extremely dry and far from the urban marketplace. On the eastern edge of this vast desert is central Australia, the country south of Tennant Creek, north of Oodnadatta, east of Kalgoorlie and west of Birdsville.

Europeans had no lasting business in the centre until 1871–72 when the Australian colonies were connected to Britain by a telegraph line from Adelaide to London. This brought small-scale settlement to Alice Springs, Barrow Creek and several other repeater stations. South Australian land speculation resulted in the purchase of pastoral leases on country near the telegraph line but brought little actual investment. In 1910 the commonwealth relieved South Australia of the burden of governing the Northern Territory. Central Australia was by then known to be a poor region for grazing and agriculture, its rains being unreliable, and transport to settled parts of Australia slow and expensive.

However thin European settlement was, it quickly affected the livelihood of the Aborigines who had inhabited the area for thousands of years. There was little well-watered country (about 15 per cent of the centre), and Europeans, armed with better weapons and with confidence in their superior right to the land, took what they wanted and forced the Aborigines to accommodate to their presence. But by 1939 pastoral settlement had spread almost as far as it ever would, leaving huge areas of vacant crown land and Aboriginal reserves. On the cattle stations, unfenced, unbranded, infrequently mustered herds damaged native flora and many water sources beyond repair.

The commonwealth estimated in 1940 that it was responsible for the welfare of almost 14 000 'full blood' Aborigines in the Territory. Some of these people had still no contact with Europeans. Commonwealth authorities were converted to a policy of assimilation from 1937 to 1951. To be saved from extinction and exploitation Aborigines were to be humanely directed away from their traditions towards the schooling, medicine, money and jobs of the modern world.



Santa Teresa, a Catholic mission to the eastern Aranda, east of Alice Springs in 1965. Photograph by David Moore after eight years of drought.

Europeans' confidence in assimilation was based on the belief that Aboriginal society was fragile, and that customs and beliefs were vulnerable to the attractions of European goods—foods, clothes, alcohol, guns and vehicles. Supplying some of these goods as rations seemed to dislocate Aborigines from their homelands and to undermine the authority of older men and women. Observers in the 1930s wrote accounts of social disintegration, even among natives on reserves and in the deserts beyond settlement. The degradation of Aborigines was said to be rapid: two generations would see the end of all their traditions.

But Aboriginal responses to the arrival of Europeans were complex. Their travelling long distances to obtain European goods did not necessarily indicate tribal breakdown. Patterns of movement were traditionally wide and independent of the spiritual attachment to particular places which gave Aborigines their personal identity and their social order. The people of the Centre—the Pintupi, Aranda, Walpiri, Anmatjira, Keytej, Luritja and Pitjantjatjara—while attaching great importance to kinship and place of birth in establishing an individual's belonging to a tract of land and his or her spiritual obligations to it, were pragmatic in the decisions they made about getting enough to live on. They formed small groups whose size and composition were decided by the demands which their arid environment made of them.

These groups regarded large stretches of territory as their hunting and foraging grounds, and were flexible in recognising others' rights to find food. When Europeans offered food-gathering opportunities that were entirely novel, Aborigines were prepared to travel far from their homelands to take advantage of them, as they would to escape the effects of drought. The new sources of food did indeed alter their reliance on traditional food-getting, and so did the development of Alice Springs and the stocking of pastoral leases. But the advocates of assimilation were proved to be wrong in assuming that changes in material life would undermine Aboriginal beliefs about the land and about kinship.

With hindsight we can see that Central Australian Aborigines adapted their traditions to the circumstances Europeans had created. To Central Australian Aborigines it is simply inconceivable that any human action could alter what they call 'the Law'. Sometimes called by Europeans 'the Dreaming', the Law consists of the timeless customs of Aborigines' mythical ancestors, whose deeds are remembered in songs and are evident in the very forms of the country. Aborigines do not believe the Law is changeable, and find the European's propensity to change their own laws bizarre. Their quiet sense of the necessary continuity of their own culture has proved to be an inner strength.

But inner strength required political support. Some Aborigines found political allies. Central Australia, as part of the Northern Territory, was administered from Canberra until 1978, by federal governments more answerable to the residents of the southeastern capital cities than to the few settlers. When the federal electorate could be convinced that reforms of Aboriginal welfare policy were needed in the Territory, then Canberra authority would prevail over the preferences of reluctant local residents.

In central Australia, since 1939, the worldwide diffusion of the culture of Europe has experienced a rare moment of hesitation. To understand this we need to examine the two strongest declarations of a European presence: the town of Alice Springs, and the tourist wonder, Ayers Rock.

In 1929 the railway line from Adelaide to Oodnadatta was extended to Stuart, the small town near the Alice Springs repeater station on the overland telegraph line. Settlers began to use the two-way short-wave radio. The first cars and trucks appeared in the early 1920s. Such transport and communications made possible



other aspects of civilised living. In 1933 Stuart was renamed Alice Springs, and in 1936 a shop dealing only in clothes for women opened. The Christian faiths built three churches, three residences and one school in the decade before the war. To visitors it seemed a time of rapid progress; one told the monthly *Walkabout* in 1940 that there were 'two good hotels, a picture theatre, golf links, tennis courts, a roller skating rink, and even a race course'.

About 600 people lived there, half of them classified as 'half-castes', who lived in an area called Rainbow Town, about a kilometre south of the shops and homes of the Europeans. The 'half-caste' children were schooled separately from the white children, at the Bungalow (the old telegraph station) about two kilometres north of the town. Many of their parents worked for the Europeans, but there was little social interaction and even less intermarriage between whites and blacks. Indeed, Aborigines, whether 'full-blood' or 'half-caste', were not allowed into the town unless they were under supervision by police or employer.

For hundreds of kilometres around Alice Springs there was arid country which included some vast but not very productive pastoral leases. Beyond the cattle herds to the west the Lutherans had run a mission at Hermannsburg since 1877. Roaming this hinterland and gathering at homesteads and at the mission were Aboriginal people whose numbers were estimated to be a few thousand. Alice Springs stood on the land of the Aranda. The town was a garrison of white values, an antidote to settlers' sense of disorder, discomfort and danger on the frontier. When in 1937 the numbers of 'full-blood' Aborigines coming into town threatened to overflow the paddock set aside for them just outside of town, the Protector of Aborigines set up a ration depot at Jay Creek, a good day's walk to the west, in an effort to keep out the Aranda and the Pitjantjatjara and Luritja visiting from the west.

World War II upset these arrangements. Alice Springs became the centre of Northern Territory administration after the Japanese bombed Darwin in February 1942, and it was a base for 5000 troops. 'Half-caste' children were sent to Adelaide and Sydney, and from 1942 to 1945 the Bungalow became the home of between 100 and 150 Aborigines whom the army employed as labourers. They were recruited from Hermannsburg and from cattle stations in the district because available 'half-castes' were too few for the army's needs. The military need for labour caused the Native Affairs officers to rethink their strategy for keeping Alice Springs 'white'.

'Half-caste' Aboriginal children placed in orderly rows at the Bungalow, north of Alice Springs, 1941. They were later sent to Adelaide and to Mulgoa, NSW, for the rest of the war. Photograph by R. Pearse, Department of Information.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

The Aboriginal settlements of the South Australian and Northern Territory portions of central Australia. Iwupataka is the Aboriginal name, now accepted officially, for the settlement referred to in the text as Jay Creek.

Map drawn by J. Hayward
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY



Defences against an inhospitable Centre include parasols and clipped hedges, as Pix showed in a feature on 'the Alice' in 1950.
MAGAZINE PROMOTIONS



Both civil and military authorities thought it was risky to have 'full-bloods' close to Europeans. In 1940 a Native Affairs Branch patrol had found that one-third of Walpiri and Warrumungu at Tennant Creek (see map) had venereal disease. The strip of land within eight kilometres of the Stuart Highway was declared out of bounds for Aborigines, to shield road gangs and convoy drivers from disease. In Alice Springs few Aboriginal women were employed as domestics, and the wives and children of the labourers billeted at the Bungalow were told not to leave Jay Creek. Supervising Aboriginal workers was not easy. In 1944 police complained that Aborigines were attracted into town at night by the cinema and by the chance of prostitution. Saturday afternoons and Sundays were times of potential indiscipline. The army took the Bungalow people off to the cinema in trucks on Saturday, and the Lutherans conducted services for them on Sunday. The problem of discipline became a boon to the Catholics, who had been pressing for government help to set up a mission: now they got it. In July 1942 about half the 356

'full-bloods' counted in the vicinity of the town were moved 110 kilometres east to Arltunga, the new Catholic mission site.

The Native Affairs Branch was understaffed and suffered from a rough-and-ready approach which it had never been in the interests of any other Europeans to challenge. The correspondence files of the local Native Welfare Branch office show a surprising ignorance about the employment conditions set out in ordinances governing Aboriginal welfare. The Bungalow's administration by the branch was criticised by some labourers and by army officials for not meeting the food and clothing standards set by the army. In April 1944 army officers took over the day-to-day management of the Bungalow. There were other tensions between the two authorities. When the Bungalow residents heard from some of their relatives, who walked in from Jay Creek, that they were not getting adequate food and water, Native Affairs pointed out that in other native labour camps in the Northern Territory dependants of labouring men were rationed by the army. But the greatest row occurred when the army feared that its own troops were endangered by Native Affairs' inefficiency. South of the Heavitree Gap was a camp of about 90 Aranda and Luritja people, some of them discontented refugees from Jay Creek. Conditions were rough. From the point of view of the civilian authorities gatherings south of the Gap were not a serious problem as they were separated from the town by bush, ridges and Rainbow Town. Some people from the camp did useful work in sanitation. But the camp was next to a dairy and a piggery which supplied troops and in which some camp residents worked. The army demanded that the owners of the dairy and the piggery house their employees hygienically. Native Affairs officers who had to enforce this demand were embarrassed to do so until they had improved the housing of those employed by civil authorities in the sewage farm. With tents and other materials in short supply, this was not done to the army's satisfaction.

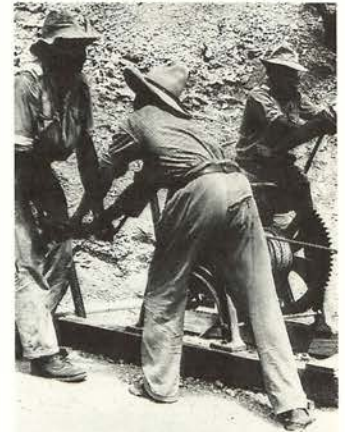
The wartime competition between two European bureaucracies with different goals expressed a tension within the European settlement of central Australia which was to surface again and again later—a contradiction between the town's need for Aboriginal labour and the wish to keep the town 'civilised'.

The war promoted the growth of Alice Springs. The army left an underground water supply, cheap vehicles and buildings, and electricity for the eastern side of the Todd River, an area in which suburban subdivision began after the war. In 1946, 1000 people lived in Alice Springs. In the next twenty years the population grew to 6000, and to 22 000 in 1984. Although pastoral businesses were the staple private enterprise of the region, it was commonwealth government spending, on welfare administration, railway and road transport and defence, that made the economy prosper. About one-quarter of the houses built before the mid-1960s were commissioned by the government for its own employees. From 1961 to 1966, 40 per cent of building work depended on government contracts. Many privately built houses were financed cheaply by the commonwealth from 1953. Water and electricity supplies depended on subsidies until the mid-1960s.

At the end of the war the commonwealth began to develop the network of settlements. They became the basis of the assimilation policy which the commonwealth explicitly adopted in 1951. Because reserves for Aborigines had not kept them from seeking contact with Europeans, and because the army had shown that even the most 'primitive' nomad could be turned into a useful employee, the commonwealth decided that it should educate all Aborigines in European ways. Beyond the pastoral leases, the new settlements could be run with the help of missionaries (see map), whose work commonwealth officials had been wanting to supervise more closely since the late 1930s. Settlement life would allow the

In December 1942 Aboriginal labourers attached to the Fourth Army Troop Company, Royal Australian Engineers, work a winch to haul material to the summit of Billygoat Hill in the centre of Alice Springs. They are building a 20 000-gallon water tank in which to store underground waters recently discovered by the army.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL



schooling of children whose parents were thought to be beyond re-education. In one version of the theory of assimilation the 'half-castes' of Rainbow Town were a more advanced group who could expect to continue to get jobs and to aspire to live in proper houses in the European parts of town. This aim was made all the more necessary when, in 1964, Rainbow Town was absorbed by Alice Springs as urban settlement spread south.

The assimilation philosophy implied that Aborigines still needed supervision until they learned to be responsible for themselves. So nearly all Aborigines in the Territory were classed as 'wards' in 1953. The Director of Social Welfare (which incorporated the old Native Affairs Branch's staff and duties) had many powers over the movement, employment, residence, wages and even marriage of wards until 1964, when the Northern Territory legislative assembly passed a new social welfare ordinance.

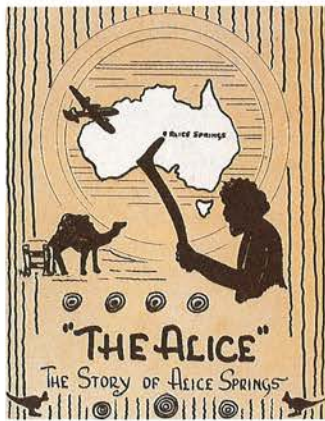
But no matter how well buttressed with legal powers, assimilation policy faced a major difficulty. Its goal was to create an Aboriginal population whose behaviour resembled 'normal' European behaviour. Such a vague notion inevitably was understood in different ways. The government, responding to public opinion outside the Northern Territory, worked to a timetable too rapid for many local Europeans. It was also difficult for Europeans to be consistent. It was one thing to have Aborigines working in jobs that there were not enough Europeans to do, and even to pay them award wages. It was quite another to accept them as neighbours. Aborigines understood the process of assimilation in their own unpredictable ways. The right to drink alcohol, gained with the 1964 welfare ordinance, may have symbolised equality in citizenship more eloquently than the concession of the right to vote, in 1962. Assimilation has been criticised by Aborigines, such as Gary Foley, as intending cultural genocide—the attempt by Europeans to eradicate Aboriginal culture insofar as it was seen to handicap them. In central Australia this intention was harder to realise than anyone expected. The chairman of the Northern Territory Housing Commission in May 1961 expressed hope that 'occupation of a standard home would become the hallmark of an assimilated Aborigine'. It is unlikely that he imagined that within twenty years, many Aborigines would live in town without having consented to assimilate.

The rationing of Aborigines in distant depots had been instituted to keep bush Aborigines out of the way of townspeople and pastoralists. Under the policy of assimilation the ration depots were upgraded to settlements where schooling and medical services were offered. Walpiri, Pitjantjatjara and Pintupi on the reserves were sought out by welfare officials so that medical services and schooling could be extended to them. It was necessary, said officials, that nomadic traditions be discouraged. But it was hard to make settlements into attractive places. They were not always on the traditional lands of those who were supposed to live on them. Papunya was too far east for the Pintupi, and so was Areyonga for many of the Pitjantjatjara. When Walpiri taken to Hooker Creek walked south to Yuendumu on their own country, they were trucked back to Hooker Creek by welfare officials. Wards were obliged to go where they were told.

Yet settlements, by concentrating people in large numbers, created shortages of local food and firewood, increasing Aborigines' dependence on less nourishing and unfamiliar European food. Concentrations of nomads were also unhygienic, and they aggravated disputes among people who were used to living in small scattered groups. Consuming alcohol was a common and destructive response to the misery caused by settlements. Pintupi people, who since 1982 have lived on their own country to the west, remember Papunya as a foreign, miserable place of alcoholism, drunken fighting, car accidents and murder. There was a high turnover of

K.F. Sneddon's cover of a booklet published in 1960 by the Alice Springs branch of the Country Women's Association.

CORNSTALK BOOKSHOP





Religious instruction was an important part of the assimilation program. A picnic at Santa Teresa mission in 1965. Photograph by David Moore.

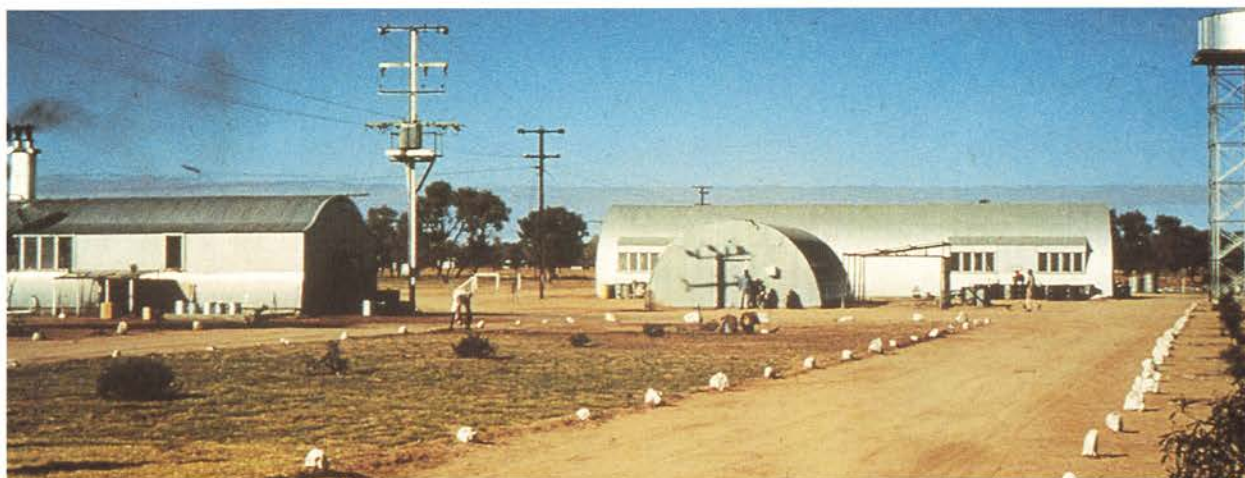
European staff: in the mid-1960s only two out of every three positions on settlements could be filled. For Europeans too the settlements were squalid disasters. The medical and school services, which were the reason for having settlements, were understaffed, often by Europeans poorly trained for the cultural complexity of their job.

Aboriginal health throughout central Australia was appalling. The demographer F.L. Jones, using the government's register of wards, estimated in 1963 that between 1958 and 1960 in central Australia the rate of mortality in babies under one year of age was 208 per thousand live births. Researchers at Haasts Bluff in 1965 found abnormally high incidences of ear, nose and throat problems, gastroenteritis and respiratory infections. They traced a connection with malnutrition and pointed to overcrowding as a contributing cause. Another study of health on central Australian settlements and missions between 1965 and 1969 showed that the mortality rate of Aboriginal infants under one month of age was three times higher than the rate for Australians as a whole. The settlement Aborigines' infant mortality rate (for children under one year of age) was seven times worse. Trachoma caused blindness to be common. The excessive consumption of alcohol caused health problems, and aggravated the risk of car accidents and the severity of fighting. Crowding nomadic peoples who were used to settling differences by moving away from each other caused tension. Even the apparently harmless policy of asking Pintupi people to use knives and forks and to queue for food in a large mess hall could cause stress and shame.



A float in the Alice Springs Bangtail Muster, 1961, parodies an old advertisement for Pelaco shirts in which a comic Aborigine says 'Mine tink it they fit'. Now, writes political scientist Colin Tatz, who took the photograph, the comedy is in the response of 'whites who were trying to sanitize and starch Aborigines through the Welfare Branch's social engineering program'.

AIAS



Amoonguna settlement in 1961, showing the building in which 'wards' were fed communally. Only Haasts Bluff, of all the central Australian government settlements, had no communal kitchen and dining room. By 1969 critics of the Department of Interior, including the minister in charge of Aboriginal affairs, W.C. Wentworth, were calling for an end to communal feeding on the grounds that it created dependency and malnutrition and undermined the kin-based relationships that had long governed Aborigines' getting, cooking and consumption of food. Photograph by Colin Tatz.

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF
ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Settlements created health problems even as their custodians tried to remedy others. The educational and medical benefits of settlement regimes were small compared with the price that their residents paid.

Information about the health of Aborigines on pastoral leases was not so easy to obtain. The government established schools on some, and the churches built chapels on a few. The Social Welfare Branch encouraged pastoralists to keep Aborigines as labour by setting their minimum wages low and by paying employers an allowance for feeding, clothing and housing dependants. The government was indulgent towards the pastoralists who were not required to keep account of the money they were meant to spend on Aboriginal welfare. Some were known to practise 'nigger farming'—spending less than was received and claiming welfare subsidies in respect of non-existent Aboriginal residents. During the drought of 1957–65 this may have kept the dingo from some pastoralists' doors. Often Aborigines accepted poor conditions because they had developed understandings with the leaseholders which allowed them to stay on their traditional land and to visit, without 'trespassing', sacred sites within leasehold boundaries.

But some pastoralists began to do without Aboriginal labour drawn from communities on whose land they had their leases. Improved road transport put an end to droving by the late 1960s. The construction of boundary fences cost the jobs of some people who had looked after cattle. The welfare responsibility that the commonwealth expected pastoralists to exercise was not agreeable to some of them, particularly if Aborigines' aspirations were raised by the stated aims of assimilation. After 1964, when Aborigines became freer and got legal access to alcohol, pastoralists felt their authority slipping. When the drought ravaged the centre, they had to make hard decisions about what they could afford. All in all, it was becoming less attractive for many of them to allow large communities of Aborigines to live on their leases. The number of Aborigines employed on cattle stations in central Australia fell from 427 in 1958 to 221 in 1964–65. Even so, about 1700 Aborigines, workers and dependants included, still lived on pastoral leases in 1964–65. Pastoralists seem to have varied in their policies. Of 89 leases, 32 had no Aboriginal residents. Of the other 57, four had more than 100 each.

Two developments made it even less attractive to tolerate Aborigines on properties. In 1968 an Arbitration Commission decision gave them wages equal with whites', making casual labour or the employment of only a few trusted Aborigines more attractive. And from 1966 welfare payments were made more easily available and were paid directly to individual Aborigines. In these years also,

the settlements reached their most overcrowded and distressed condition. There was a new wave of Aboriginal urbanisation. Having disrupted traditional ways of living in the hinterland Europeans had not succeeded in holding Aborigines there. To see the effects on Alice Springs we must first review the steps taken to control Aborigines native to the town area, the Aranda.

The Bungalow, which had been used for the settlement of many Aranda throughout the 1950s, had become overcrowded. It was also uncomfortably close to the town, and its old telegraph station buildings were of new interest to Europeans as heritage. So another settlement, Amoonguna, was established, fourteen kilometres southwest of Alice Springs, in 1961. Amoonguna was subject to a number of competing pressures. Using special houses graded into three levels of similarity to European houses, the residents were supposed to learn how to live lives fit for Alice Springs. But not only was Amoonguna too understaffed and overcrowded for training and health programs to proceed: Europeans were slow to realise that this type of housing was culturally inappropriate. Amoonguna had few graduates. Yet Amoonguna residents keen to work in Alice Springs could earn the basic wage or more. Those most employable in town found living at Amoonguna less and less satisfactory, especially when its population became swollen with refugees from other settlements in crisis, such as Jay Creek, which had long suffered from a shortage of water.

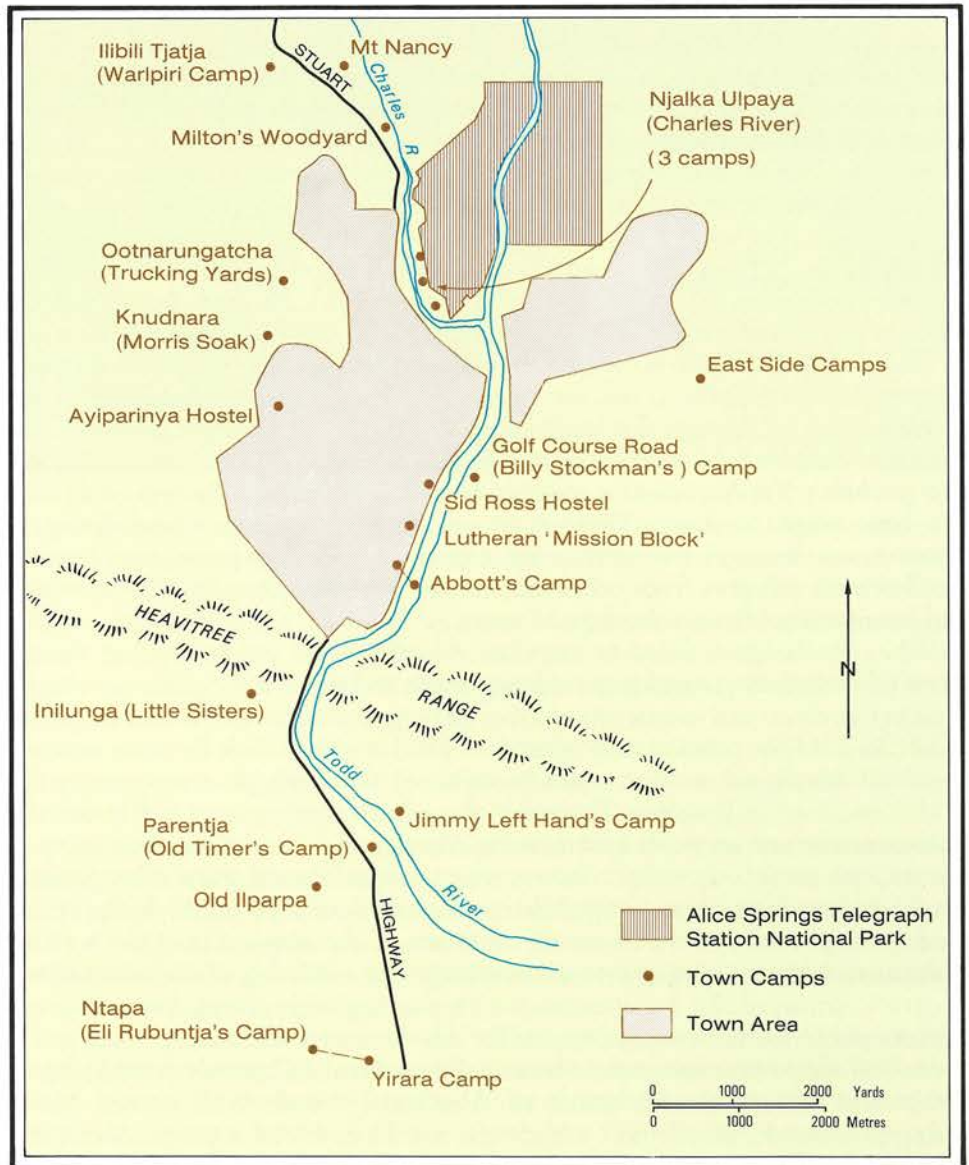
When Amoonguna failed to assimilate Aranda people and to regulate visitors from other settlements and pastoral leases, more and more Aborigines were to be seen in the streets and vacant lots of Alice Springs, and in the dry bed of the Todd River. In 1961 the town management board had begun to look for a site in town to which Aboriginal campers could be confined. One such place was run by the Lutherans, close to Rainbow Town and the suburb that replaced it. Because the Lutherans allowed no alcohol there, some Aborigines preferred the illicit camp at Morris Soak on the other edge of town, where Albert Namatjira and other painters made artefacts for tourists. Several illicit campsites flourished on the banks of the Todd and Charles rivers and on the outskirts of the town. The 1964 welfare ordinance, which was meant to acknowledge the maturing of the assimilation program, removed the legal means for suppressing such camps, but it did not prevent police from harassing campers for drunkenness and truancy.

In 1967 the town management board estimated that 143 people were living in camps and 125 in the backyards of Aboriginal friends with houses. Many Europeans found this offensive and dangerous. They sensed a strong Aboriginal desire to use the town and to live in it, even if only for a few months or weeks at a time, without having first been assimilated. These unorthodox residents often had money to spend, at first wages, then increasingly welfare payments. Some had jobs in town. But they were not regarded by the Housing Commission as suitable clients, and few of their children attended school.

In 1974 a group of dissident European clergy and professionals helped the town campers to start their own political pressure group, Tangentyere Council. Its aim was to make the government recognise the peculiar residential needs of Aranda people and others whom pastoralists had ejected from their land. It asked for special-purpose leases to be granted at selected sites where people were camping already informally, and at some others.

Tangentyere Council had first to establish that the Aranda were willing to have Walpiri, Pintupi, Pitjantjatjara, Luritja, Alyawarra, Anmatjira and Keytej camps permanently within their territory. They did. But it was much harder to get the federal Department of the Northern Territory to agree to the leases. The first, Ntapa, was not granted until 1977 and only after '149 items of correspondence and

The Alice Springs town camps listed by Aboriginal Hostels (Limited). About 1500 people resided in them, though it is difficult to be precise about their population because residents frequently moved to and from places beyond the town boundaries. Map drawn by J. Hayward
 AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY



numerous meetings, telephone calls and telexes'. By 1984 there were fifteen leases accommodating about 1500 Aborigines, by far the majority of the Aborigines living in Alice Springs. Some town campers were only temporarily resident in town, waiting to get better access and tenure to lands on pastoral leases, or just visiting town for a few days or weeks. The camps themselves were permanent. Houses built with commonwealth grants were designed in close consultation with the town campers, and placed together on the leases in arrangements that suited their customs. Alice Springs now had two very different styles of suburban living. The Aboriginal way used more space around the houses than was available on a normal suburban block. These houses were not in rows. Toilets and showers were in the one common building. Much of day-to-day life was enjoyed out of doors and larger family units embraced a number of households. There was a much stronger sense of community than usual in European streets of nuclear families, and

it had become clear how foreign to Aborigines of central Australia is the average Australian family home, in a street of similar homes.

The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, passed by the federal parliament in 1976, excluded town land from Aboriginal claim. The Aranda's attempt to preserve their heritage had therefore to rely on nominating sacred sites within the town. Site registration clashed with the interests of some developers. It could have placed the entire Sadadeen Valley, on the eastern edge of town, beyond the powers of town planners and developers. For many Europeans such concessions were too expensive, both financially and psychologically. For the Aranda it was a question beyond discussion: it was not within anybody's power to alter the stories of the Law which made these places so significant. The bulldozing of one site in 1983, by a contractor in the service of the Northern Territory government (the Territory having been granted a large measure of self-government in 1978), caused distress, fear and anger.

The Aranda required the sites if they were to educate their children independently. When seeking in 1978 to establish teaching programs in the town camps, the Aborigines and Europeans who wanted to start such schooling reported from a survey of four camps that only 7 of 106 children attended school, and then only intermittently. The Education Department of the Northern Territory resisted the proposed 'bi-cultural' curriculum of the Yipirinye School in which Aranda customs and language would be taught side by side with a European syllabus. Yipirinye School limped along with donations, church grants and voluntary labour until 1983 when the commonwealth granted the money it needed.



Beyond Alice Springs there have been few settlements of Europeans in central Australia apart from small numbers at pastoral homesteads and missions and settlements. By 1939 Alice Springs was the only settlement for hundreds of kilometres worthy of the title 'town'. But a new focus of European settlement began later to emerge—Ayers Rock, accompanied from 1984 by the nearby tourist resort of Yulara.

Sighted and named in 1872 by William Gosse, the Rock remained beyond European settlement, falling within the South West reserve which was gazetted in 1920. Until Ayers Rock and nearby Mount Olga were excised from the reserve in 1958 non-Aborigines needed official permission to visit it.

For the Pitjantjatjara and Yankuntjara Ayers Rock was still Uluru, a cluster of springs and waterholes around the rock's base, sacred places marking episodes in the wanderings of superhuman ancestors. These wanderings were commemorated in their Law, stored in song cycles, traced on objects, and relived in the use of the tracks which criss-crossed the deserts and ranges between places of water, game and vegetable foods. At Uluru several of these tracks intersected. It was a special place, one of many frequented by those whom whites came to call the Pitjanjatjara or Luritja. Between the wars prospectors, dingo-hunters, missionaries, patrol officers and policemen occasionally visited the area, by horse, camel and, with great difficulty, by car. In 1934 a policeman shot and killed one of Uluru's custodians. The reserve was not the sanctuary it was meant to be, though it offered some protection if only because Europeans had few reasons for visiting the regions beyond pastoral settlement. In any case the Pitjantjatjara were attracted out of the reserve to see what Europeans were like and to see what they might have to give or to trade. A severe drought in the 1930s hastened this exploratory exodus. After

the war a number of settlements and missions on the eastern edge of Pitjanjatjara country were given the task of assimilating these people—Ernabella, Hermannsburg, Areyonga, and later Musgrave Park (renamed Amata) and Docker River.

Assimilation was intended to empty the desert of its nomads, leaving Europeans free to recognise and develop the tourist potential of Ayers Rock and Mount Olga (Katajuta). The publicity organ of the tourist industry, *Walkabout*, published photographs and stories about the Rock in October 1941, January 1949 and October 1950. The Curtin Springs leaseholder, Merv Andrews, made a vehicle track to it in 1947. Truck and bus drivers in Alice Springs began to offer the more intrepid tourist tours to the Rock from 1952. It was this interest that led the government to declare Ayers Rock–Mount Olga National Park in 1958. There were 2300 visitors in that year. They saw Aboriginal families with dogs and camels, still wandering between the settlements and stopping at Uluru.

The behaviour of isolated intruders had made local Aborigines fear and mistrust the European. The more numerous aliens arriving in the 1950s were perhaps perceived as exhibiting a naive curiosity and a strange desire to climb and to photograph. Only when tourists blundered into sacred caves and waterholes did the custodians of Uluru's sites realise that a new threat had arrived. The man whose brother had been killed in 1934 spoke of one such incident in November 1971. His words were translated by Bill Edwards of Ernabella.

A white girl has gone through mine, my holy cave. And I became very sad. And I am constantly sad. And, I am speaking to you. Perhaps you will help me, please. Others have broken my camp, they have gone through it and broken it completely.

Never dispossessed of their lands by pastoralists, these Aborigines now faced a different kind of invasion.

For tourists were not only excited by the magnificent Rock. They were also fascinated to glimpse the authentically 'primitive' culture of the region. They wanted to see Aborigines and buy artefacts. They might not always see Aborigines at the Rock, but in 1961 they would see up to 250 at Angas Downs, 100 kilometres east, and several dozen at Curtin Springs. During the drought of 1957–65, pastoralists opened road-houses to trade with tourists. The Aborigines at Angas Downs, Mulga Park, Curtin Springs and Mount Ebenezer were pleased to sell artefacts to the travellers, as that made them less dependent on welfare officials. The Northern Territory Welfare Branch was embarrassed by these untidy displays of the unassimilated, but it could do little. Officials began to see Angas Downs in particular as a renegade welfare settlement which they could not disband.

The people whom the tourists saw at Angas Downs and Curtin Springs were indeed the real thing, no matter how untidy they seemed to the administration, for their Law was stronger than any assimilation program. Ceremonial gatherings, of a size that would have been impossible before the introduction of European foods and transportation, were reported at all the settlements of the region well into the 1980s. Rituals remained secret, but they were travelling rituals: songs and ceremonies were handed from community to community, and hundreds of people came to take part each occasion. Any individual had family connections at several communities, and this often implied ceremonial obligations. So while people lived for much of the time at one settlement or homestead, they would continue to inhabit and to use the region as a whole, as a network of camps.

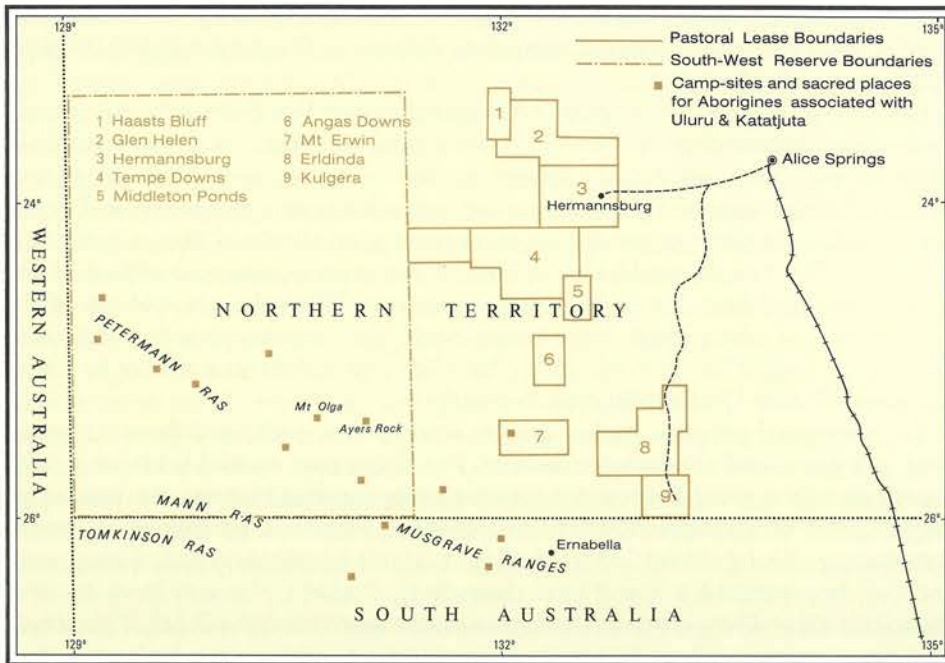
The assimilation program failed to build communities of permanent residents where children could be trained in European ways and not in the ways of their parents. Pitjanjatjara people accepted the food, services and pensions offered as

Areyonga settlement in 1961.
Photograph by Colin Tatz.
AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF
ABORIGINAL STUDIES



Two of the most important figures in the postwar depiction of outback Aborigines to urban Australians: Eric Jolliffe, cartoonist, supported by Bill Harney, writer, and later park ranger, sketches Aboriginal drawings in a cave at Ayers Rock in 1951. Aborigines at Ayers Rock now have more power to control access to caves and to the paintings inside, many of which are sacred.

FAIRFAX PHOTO LIBRARY



The European settlement of central Australia did not extend any farther west than the boundaries of the most western pastoral leases, the only ones shown on this map. The camp sites and sacred places of the Pitjantjatjara and the Yankuntjatjara people were listed in 1979 in the Aboriginal Land Commission's hearing of the Uluru/Lake Amadeus claim. We know of them through the fieldwork of Dr Robert Layton. The South West Reserve had been gazetted by the commonwealth in 1920. In 1940 the boundaries were redrawn, creating a corridor north of Ayers Rock to the Western Australian border. Map drawn by T. Baumann.
 AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

inducements to stay in settlements, but they also slipped away discretely with their children for weeks or months, to attend ceremonies, to visit family, to take advantage of good hunting and foraging conditions, and to sell things to tourists on the roads. Travel between settlements was essential to the education of the young. How else would they know how to feed themselves and how and where to perform the ceremonies that made the world of humans, animals and plants work properly? Aborigines did not concede that they should settle down. Northern Territory welfare authorities reported in 1962 that at Ayers Rock:

Patrol officers were questioned ... when the leaders of approximately sixty wards demanded to know on what authority they were required to return to Areyonga. These people regarded the Rock as their country and believed they had a perfect right to remain as long as they desired.

Sensitive to the tourists' uneasiness about wandering Aborigines begging in rags, the Welfare Branch began in 1961 to consider establishing a settlement far to the west of Uluru, in the Petermann Ranges. They knew the Pitjantjatjara were interested in resettling that area. When the commonwealth opened the Docker River settlement in 1968 patrol officers tried unsuccessfully to persuade people from taking their camels and dogs with them. Officials reported the resettlement as 'exuberant'. Three hundred were expected there by December 1969, but the Welfare Branch report for 1969-70 counted 400. People came from the west as well as the east, as Docker River became the centre of intense ceremonial action to make up for the years of absence. One observer recalled a gathering of 2100 people there in 1972. Intending only to clear Aborigines from the Ayers Rock road, the Welfare Branch had created one of the first and best-equipped Pitjantjatjara homeland centres.

While they were attempting to relocate Pitjantjatjara people, Europeans were planning to expand tourist access to Ayers Rock. The commonwealth and tourist companies between them commissioned six reports from 1965 to 1977 on the natural environment of the park and its possibilities for tourism. From 1977



An Aboriginal family in the Ernabella region, c1958. Photograph by Winifred Hilliard.

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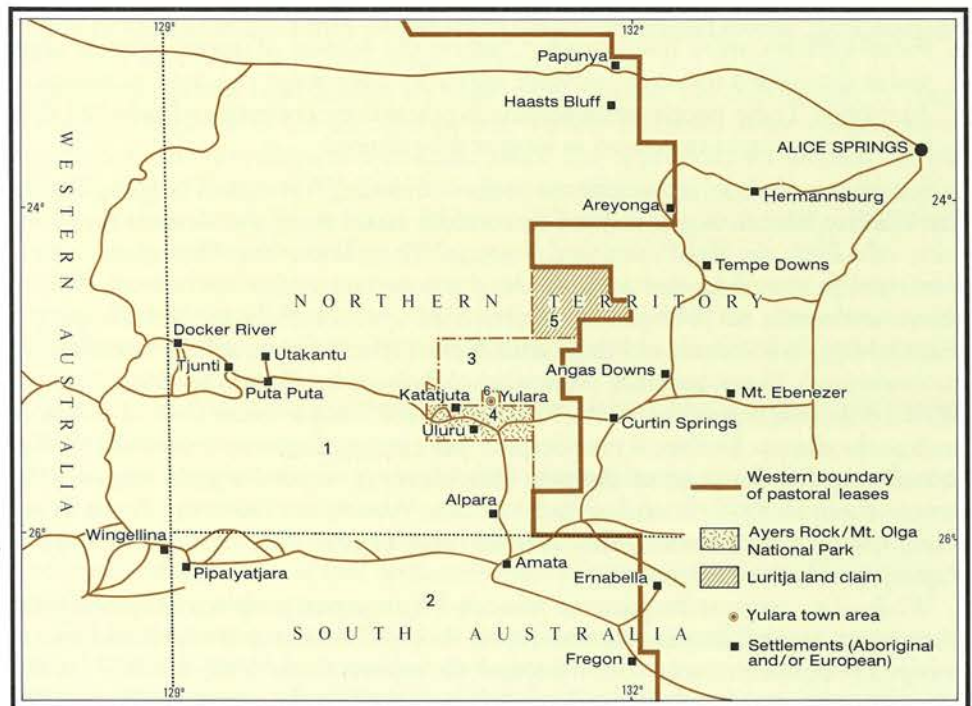
government and private enterprise built the Yulara Tourist Village. In its first year, 1984, Yulara was intended to accommodate as many of the projected 149 000 park visitors as needed to stay.

Comfort and conservation guided Yulara's planners. The journey has been made easier by an airport near the Rock receiving passenger jets, a bitumen road from Alice Springs, and faster rail connections from Sydney and Adelaide. Resort facilities would remove visitors from the outback's hearty roughness and create opportunities for them to spend a lot more money on accommodation, petrol and souvenirs. The visitors could look at one of the most photogenic objects in the world without losing any of the body's comforts. What they would see, if the authorities had their way, was nature with the human presence removed. Government supervision would give plants, animals and dunes a chance to return to a 'natural' state. Uluru must remain a park.

To Aboriginal people a park made no sense unless it allowed them to gather food, get water and conduct ceremonies. But doing that created what seemed to European eyes a mess. Even a sympathetic observer, Bill Harney, the park's first ranger (1958–60), had described the people living there as a 'greater lot of vandals than the unthinking tourists'. With dogs and camels Aborigines made a mess and a smell as they pursued a living near their camp. Yulara's planners seem to have shared this view. They wanted Aborigines to live away from the Rock. They could be visitors, rangers and artefact-makers, but residents only over at Yulara.

But in the years when Yulara was being planned and built, Aboriginal use of the Pitjantjatjara region was becoming even more independent. Setting up Docker River in 1968 strengthened connections between people in the west of the central Australian reserves and those in its east. It provided a new resource base in a traditional line of ceremony and kinship across the centre of the continent. A new road connected Docker River more comfortably to Uluru and points east, and thereby improved the road network throughout the reserves that defence

Pastoral settlement increased a little in the 1940s and then extended no farther west. In 1977 the old reserve land was transferred to the Petermann Land Trust and to other Aboriginal land-owning corporations. The area marked 3 was successfully claimed in 1979–80 by Aborigines associated with Ayers Rock. In 1980 legislation in South Australia gave Aborigines title to area 2. In 1985 the federal government gave the Uluru National Park (area 4) to the Aborigines who owned area 3. At the time of writing area 5 was still under claim. Because Yulara is a town it cannot be claimed by Aborigines, so it remains an island of commercial development, the hinge on which the economic priorities of the region will turn. Map drawn by T. Baumann. AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY



authorities had constructed in the late 1950s to help their rocket testing. In the late 1960s Aborigines in the centre began to discard camels in favour of second-hand cars bought with welfare cheques and higher wages and later, from grants to communities. In 1973 the commonwealth extended unemployment benefits to people previously thought to be too nomadic to be eligible for them. These changes altered the relationship between travelling and settling for Pitjantjatjara people, making it easier to travel long distances while shortening the time on the road. Uluru in particular became a more frequently visited place, as it lay on the new vehicle route connecting the east and west of the reserve.

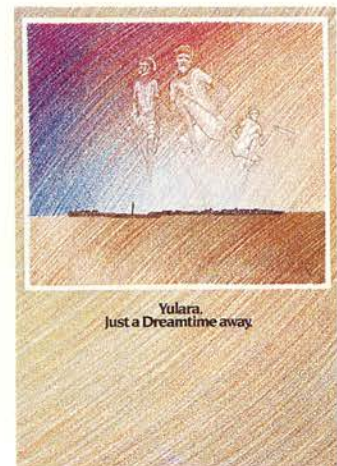
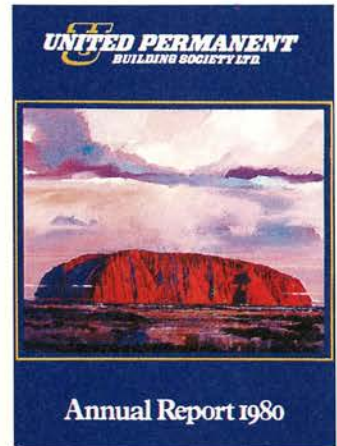
The reserve and some neighbouring pastoral leases contained many outstations by the late 1970s. The first Aboriginal-initiated move from a European settlement in the region was to Puta Puta west of Amata in 1971. Changes in political consciousness arose from and strengthened decentralisation. The Pitjantjatjara Council, formed at Amata in 1976, received commonwealth grants to create services for its member communities. Uluru was just one of many places where traditional owners decided they should dwell; Uluru people's care for sites there was made possible by essential services provided for tourists and by the store and petrol pump built at the Rock by the Docker River Social Club in the early 1970s.

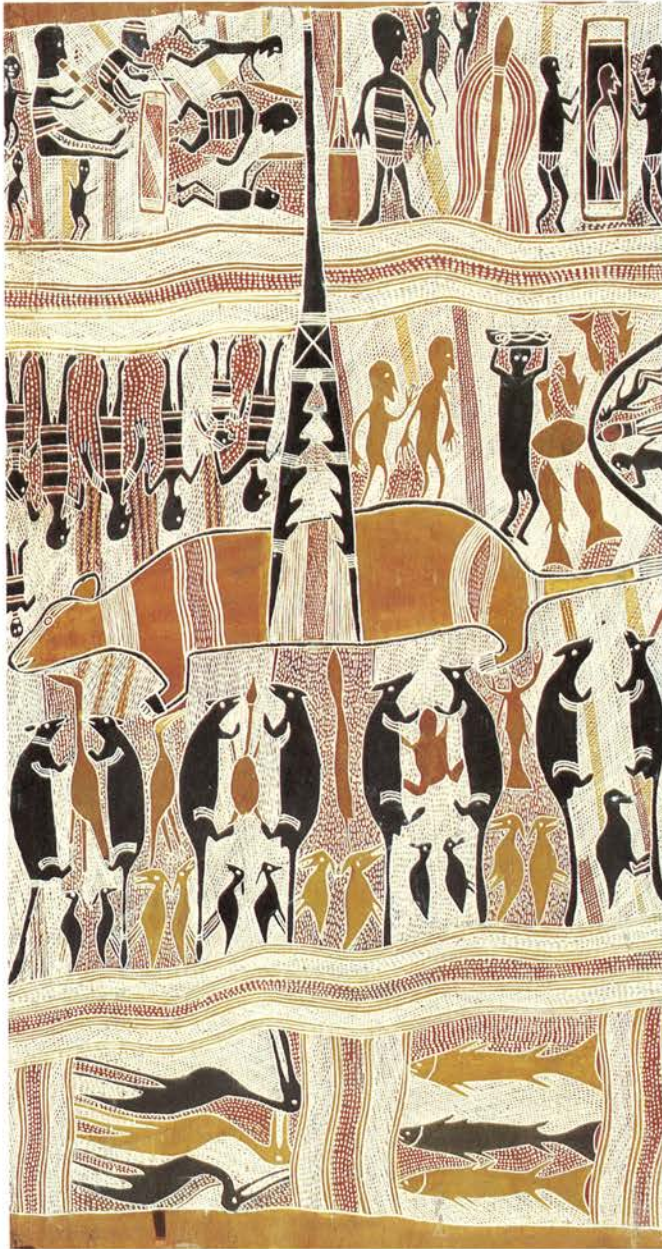
For Pitjantjatjara in the Northern Territory and South Australia the federal and state lands rights acts of 1976 and 1980 presented a secure legal basis for homeland settlement. However, when the Uluru land claim was heard in 1979 the area of the park and the Yulara village site were ruled by Justice Toohey to be not claimable. This did not stop Uluru people from living near the Rock—the commonwealth built several houses next to their store in 1980—but it placed their future residence there in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats in Canberra and Darwin. The officials' legal power to compel people to move from Uluru to Yulara ceased only in October 1985 when the commonwealth made the park Aboriginal land. After much negotiation among the two governments and the Aborigines this land was leased by traditional owners to the commonwealth's National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Mutitjuu community at Uluru are now in a better position to determine their relationship with the tourist industry. Since the 1970s, intrusions into sacred areas (some of which are now fenced) have made the community wary and anxious about the hordes of visitors the industry encourages. The locals call tourists *minga*—the word for ants. Turning the Rock into a national icon, company logo and money spinner does not command automatic respect among Aborigines. In the Land Claim Case of 1979 one man said:

That's a rock (pointing at the cliff face), but that's got to have something else; because that's got all those old (deceased) men's memories inside. Tourists can come and take a picture, but they only see a rock, poor buggers. White man's law is just paper, but our law we can carry on our shoulders.

Tourism on a massive scale threatens to open up a new chapter of anxiety and opportunity. The traditional owners have retained their camps near the Rock, and have had their association with it recognised as exceptional, free from the restrictions that apply to tourists. With Yulara nearby there will be more people, more employment and more access to consumer goods than Uluru people have ever known. They will be transformed by taking up these opportunities, in ways difficult for them to foresee. Even the most tactful European policy cannot alter the effects of a new booming regional economy in a land that fifty years ago was beyond the limits of European life. The most the people who belong to Uluru can hope for now is to adapt the legal and customary heritage that they, and other communities in the region, have never wished to discard.

Advertising proclaims that 'the Rock' is beyond time and space, either solidly untouchable, as in the United Permanent image (below), or magically transcendent and surreal, as in the other (bottom). 'Dreamtime' is appropriated to appeal to escapist yearnings; the Aboriginality of the Rock becomes part of the other-worldliness of all satisfying holidays.





The Bamabama story, by Narritjin Maymuru, painted at Yirrkala in 1976. The painting, to be read as a series of panels, illustrates the myth of Bamabama, a moral tale for children about the consequences of breaking society's rules. Bamabama was sent to get people to take part in a ceremony, shown in the top left-hand corner. He organised a race to select the participants. He knew that the fastest person was a beautiful young woman classified by custom as his sister (the inverted figures below the top left-hand frame). The two ochre figures immediately to the right are he and his sister leaving the others behind to camp. Images to the right show them fishing. The pair committed incest, and the woman died as a result. Bamabama returned to her settlement and pretended the young woman was lost. Her relatives are depicted in the top left-hand panel attacking him with sticks. He went berserk and speared a dog which turned into stone (the ochre animal that straddles the centre of the painting). He speared a loaf of cycad bread which turned back into a cycad palm (shown in yellow in the top right-hand corner). Gradually everything began to change its shape. The bottom half of the painting tells that all the people changed back into the form of their animal totems and returned to the bush. The breaking of laws, so the story teaches, leads to a chaos that can be ended only by returning to the land in the form of totemic animals.