



Why Weren't We Told?

Henry Reynolds

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Mr_wormwood says

I chose this as my first foray into Henry Reynolds writings, and i'm glad i did so. It has confirmed in my mind the importance of his work and given fresh impetus to read everything he has written.

SteveDave says

This book was a fantastic read. It tells Henry Reynolds' deeply personal story of his career as an Australian historian specialising in frontier conflict and indigenous histories. Part history, part memoir, and part historiography, what makes this book stand out from other non-fiction texts about Australian history and race-relations is Reynolds' reflection of the process of researching and writing history, as well as how this process has affected him, those around him, as well as the public as a whole. For anyone interested in the 'doing' of history, this book is fascinating.

While this book was written in the late 1990s it remains every bit as relevant today. Whether it is the current PM's recent comment that before the English arrived Australia was "nothing but bush", or the Western Australian governments' current moves to close remote indigenous communities and remove indigenous people from their homelands, the ongoing debate about the Australian History curriculum and the place of 'black armband history' within the curriculum, the historical issues that Reynolds' saw as relevant to Australia in the 1990s remain with us today.

Charlize says

I am so relieved that this is over, I had to read this for English

CJ says

I was generally aware of the levels of frontier violence that occurred during the colonisation of Australia and had read some accounts before, but it's still sickening, and all the more appalling because much of white Australia still refuses to acknowledge that the perpetrators of this genocide shouldn't be celebrated. We may not admit to still believing in Terra Nullius, but it's pretty ingrained in our cultural consciousness. One thing I didn't know was the extent to which native title rights were recognised by the British government in the 19th century. While I find the perspective of the author and his accounts of how as a white man he overcame the structural silence on Indigenous issues interesting, my main conclusion so far from this book is that I need to read more material by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors. It bothered me that despite his insistence on including Indigenous people in Australian history he still largely seemed to assume that history started post-invasion. I'm also reminded of how few Indigenous people I regularly interact with and how

much more I could and should be doing to fight racism in Australia.

Michael says

This is a fantastic book that documents the often untold history of Australia and the War which brought it under English Sovereignty. Many schools have begun to teach this in their Australian History classes since the release of this book but there are still a few old school private schools that leave this subject matter alone in their curriculum. If you're a history enthusiast or just love Australia, then this book will open your eyes to a world previously hidden from the Australian Public and the rest of the world.

Noelani says

I really enjoyed this book! I'm not an Australian so a lot of the history is lost on me, but it's a great basic introduction to the state of Aboriginal erasure in Australian history. I'm looking forward to reading his other books.

Lys Ng says

Surprisingly somewhat enjoyable, probably due to my desperation to finish it. It clearly filled out my rather '2D' understanding of 'settler history', the notion of the bushman and the indigenous political and social spheres (or lack thereof). I anticipate that MOD C will be more fulfilling than MOD B, and this will be an adequate text to analyse and form my own opinions in regards to bias and textual perspective.

Rhonda says

This is such an important topic and such an easy to read memoir-style exploration of the issues that it should be compulsory reading on every syllabus for history, cultural studies and media studies - not too mention aspiring politicians and community leaders. Author Henry Reynolds is not afraid to admit his own ignorance in his development as a historian. Great to read about his wife, Senator Margaret Reynolds, who has shared his life journey. A great complement to the author's other books.

Martin says

A confronting truth

Robyn Philip says

I couldn't put this memoir down. It is an absorbing personal account of coming to know the reality of Australia's past, and our fraught relationship with its first peoples.

That Henry Reynolds saw himself as a knowledgeable historian, but didn't know the fuller story about 'settlement' and Black-White relations in Australia is really telling. If scholars of Australian history were unaware of the reality of what happened on the frontier, then it is not surprising that those of us less steeped in history were completely ignorant of the depth of our bloody past.

Interestingly, it is accounts by white Australians of more than 160 years ago, and government reports from the early European days of expansion that corroborate this view, not only Indigenous accounts. The evidence was there in the history. It is just that only recently has it surfaced and informed debate.

Every Australian should read this book.

Sam says

This book was an interesting read but may not prove to be that revolutionary given it was published in 1991. I was fortunate enough to learn about these issues at university. However, the book brings up some issues which are still relevant today. Firstly, the anecdotes Reynolds shares are sadly not too different from a lot of the attitudes in society today. Secondly, yes we are told about Aboriginal history (every year after a particular point in primary school), however, to the point that it gives the younger generation little insight because they feel that they learn it every year and it's "boring" so they quite often tune out. This quite often means that they are unaware of how significant naming a place terra nullius was in the invasion of a country since it is taught from such a young age and the ramifications that meant for Aboriginal people. It was hard for me to rate this book because I knew a lot about the topic but I did get some insight into the more recent horrific treatment of Aboriginal people based on Reynold's first hand accounts in Townsville and some of his research. In doing so, he made it clear that it's a much larger issues to do with attitudes in a way that wasn't patronizing or overbearing.

Nikolas says

"[dispossession] ... the view of those who feel they don't belong in Australia, that they are barely tolerated guests or that they will always be so alienated from the land that they can't even contemplate being buried in Australian soil. [...] But I cannot remember a time when I did not feel at home [...] It has little to do with the will or the intellect. You either feel you belong or you don't. And once that sense is there it can't be given up, willed away or reasoned out of existence.

[...] history is often distressing, but it does enable us to know and understand the incubus which burdens us all."

Meg Dunley says

Every since I can remember, I couldn't understand why people saw others as different to themselves. As far as I knew, we were all the same in the end.

Henry Reynold's book *Why Weren't We Told* is about the discovery process that he went through (and I subsequently did too) as to how the older generation in Australia had grown up with different baggage that over the generations we have slowly been able to let go of.

Historian from Tasmania, Henry spent time living in England before returning to Australia to live in Townsville in the 60's (and I believe still does). He was confronted by the racism that was right in front of him and was accepted as ok. He took it on as something he needed to learn more about, to understand. In doing so, he became friends with Eddie Mabo (of the Land Title Case), learnt about injustice towards Aboriginal children and had to rethink his idea of Australia's supposed peaceful and heroic history.

Henry explores the history, the true history of Australia. He doesn't glorify either side, the English or Aboriginal side, he just tries to get to the bottom of a lot of the untold, accepted or hidden stories. The outcome is a sad story of many lost lives, of murder, of trusts and betrayals and of genocide. I found it shocking and moving. It is the history lesson that I was never taught and that should be taught to all Australian's.

Reynold's also highlights how much we as a people of Australia are much better at tolerating, respecting and reconciling than we ever were before. I found it an important point to make and to keep these things in mind so as not to feel weary.

After traveling through Australia in 2010 for 9 months, visiting some communities and meeting many more Indigenous people, I had come home feeling perplexed and angry about the way white Australia treated (mistreated) the traditional owners of our land: the language, the infrastructure, the policies and general patronising. I felt very little hope at that stage for the repair, reconciliation between the general white Australia and the Indigenous community that most people never see or hear.

A good friend of mine could see me struggling with this and recommended that I read this book to help my understanding of the history, Indigenous people and people who still call Indigenous people atrocious names - and think it's ok - the racist people of our country.

After reading Henry Reynolds book, *Why Weren't We Told*, I can now see we (Australia) is actually with hope and that we have to live with that. Things are going to get better and it starts with each of us taking the time.

Worth a read? You bet!!

x Meg

Mish Lee says

Super interesting book! I was forced to question my own innate prejudices and read further about the masked darkness of Australia's past.

This memoir doesn't blame the Australian population for neglecting Indigenous rights from the 1920s-1980s. After all, how could they have known when the truth was masked for decades? They weren't told! In fact, the late birth of this text (1999) reflects Reynold's own incidental participation in the Silence of the 20th

Century.

Reynolds dismantles the myth of the Australian Settler by examining the frontier violence between British 'pioneers' and Indigenous-Aborigines. He then explores the subsequent erasure of Indigenous genocide from national canon.

This text is particularly effective as Reynolds explores the erasure through a myriad of social lens - as a white child raised in 40s Tasmania, as a Queensland historian rifling through 60s academia, as a revisionist challenger of white frontier mythos. He also investigates the Australian Government's attitudes which contribute to Indigenous erasure, most keenly the Howard administration.

As Reynolds says, the inaction of one generation will "*bequeath*" the hatred to the next. Contrary to Ex-PM Howard's opinion, the current generation is not excused from taking responsibility for their ancestor's actions.

Great read! Not sure why fellow readers felt bored by this novel.

Travis says

An important book for it's time, but nearly twenty years on it has not aged well in certain spots. Aside from the move to innocence underpinning the thesis of this book, my main gripe is with the apparent ease with which Reynolds speaks for all Aboriginal people. The frequent metaphorical association with Aboriginality and death is another. By that I mean the over use of the 'burial mound,' 'bring their dead with them' spectrality metaphor he consistently uses. No doubt he's an important figure, and this is an important work, in exposing the 'cult of forgetfulness,' but it isn't without it's flaws.
