The central thesis of this work is that ideologies of Indigenous inferiority brought to colonial Australia profoundly excluded Indigenous people for social and especially economic participation in the emerging nation. These ideas were codified and made material in the various discriminatory legislation of the colonies and later the Australian state. More significantly for current debates about Indigenous disadvantage, these disabling ideologies continued to operate after the formal renunciation of overt discrimination in the 1960s and beyond.

The structure of Norris’ argument is clear with chapters covering pre-invasion social and economic life, the colonising economy, racial thinking until the mid nineteenth century, the clash between Indigenous and colonial cultures, a case study of the 1869 Victorian legislation, similar legislation in New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory, and analysis of the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER).

The early chapters present useful information on the political, intellectual and economic forces that encouraged the British ‘hunter gatherers of empire’ (Butlin, cited in Norris, 2010:25) to invade Australia with no real regard for its occupation. The concept of *terra nullius* extended to a massive unwillingness and inability to comprehend the society in place or the rights of its people. As Norris powerfully shows (following Rowley and others), the widespread refusal to seriously seek to employ the dispossessed even in times of great labour shortages is a striking feature of this settler society.

While the refusal to employ Indigenous workers under anything like equitable arrangements is a defining characteristic of Australian political economy, the picture Norris conveys underestimates the reliance on Indigenous labour in the domestic, agricultural and maritime sectors (see for example Evans et al. 1993; Kidd, 2006 and 1997; Robinson, 2008; Saunders, 1982; Stevens, 1974 and the special issue of *Labour History*, No. 69 1995).

Chapter 4 is a well-constructed analysis of the arrogance and confidence that drove the colonial ‘lords of human kind’ to conquer and then exploit Indigenous peoples worldwide. Of particular value is the section on how work came to be an ideological touchstone for self-reliance and moral rectitude. This partly explains why much of the negative commentary on Indigenous people referred
to their indolence rather than their lack of intelligence, especially in the early decades (Norris, 2010:56-57 and 63-64). Thus arguments about Indigenous people’s willingness and capacity to work plays a central role in the debate as to whether there was any possible future for them in the developing nation.

Chapter 7 is also a strong component particularly in relation to Queensland and the Northern Territory, with the complex histories of legislation rendered accessible. Norris shows how even the technical definitions of who would be subject to the various Acts incorporated notions of dysfunction and incapacity (2010:116-118). While the abuse of having wages paid into trust is mentioned (2010:123-124), the lack of reference to subsequent battles to recover the stolen wages seems regrettable.

There is a big jump from 1967 until 2007 which ignores massive social, political, demographic, economic and legislative changes in the Indigenous population and in its relations with the state. Nevertheless Norris has well argued the echoes of decade’s old ideologies of childlike, impulsive and dysfunctional people needing firm supervision and surveillance as central to the NTER or intervention. She highlights the appalling lack of respect and consultation in the devising and implementing of the NTER, and notes with concern that the Rudd-Gillard government has with minor amendments, continued the Howard scheme.

Overall, *The More Things Change*... is a useful introductory text on the perpetual problem of lack of economic participation of Indigenous people that reminds us of the long and enduring legacy of ideological and institutional racism that is more to blame than the often voiced deficits of Indigenous culture or individuals.

**References**


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