

Gillian Cowlshaw, *Black, White, or Brindle: Race in Rural Australia*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Pp. 297. US\$47.50.

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Black, White, or Brindle: Race in Rural Australia is an extremely interesting book that I would recommend not only to anthropologists interested in Aboriginal Australia and Australians concerned or perplexed by the inequalities in their society, but also to anyone interested in racism, ethnicity, or sexism. This exploration of "race relations" in western New South Wales is based on the premise that race is a social rather than natural category: it is the very construction of races that is problematic and in need of description and explanation.

Dividing the book into two parts, Gillian Cowlshaw begins her exploration with a detailed exposition of Aboriginal/European contact and interaction over more than a century from the time Europeans first entered western New South Wales. Including, among other things, discussions of Aboriginal social formations, the ecology of sheep farming, characteristics of the encroaching settlers and the white labor force, unions, cameleers from the Punjab, miscegenation, protective legislation, and the policy of "Assimilation," she describes both dramatic and mundane forms of violence against Aboriginal people. First displaced from their lands and murdered, then controlled as near slaves on stations or "protected" on reserves and missions and by restrictive laws, the dominant society effectively created a category of people different from all other Australians--the Aborigines.

In the second part of the book, Cowlshaw brings her analysis to bear on a composite of western New South Wales communities that she calls "Brindleton." In a detailed and far-ranging description that includes the shire council and its workings, the schools and schoolteachers, the government policy of "self-management," "stirrers," health and welfare departments and policies, pubs, clubs, sports associations, police, courts, and employment and unemployment, she dissects processes of social differentiation and addresses the question of why government programs have failed to alleviate inequalities in medical care, education, housing, legal services, and employment. In doing so she illustrates how racism is maintained and perpetuated by the structures of the dominant society and through the ideology and practice of its inhabitants. Interwoven in this discussion is a reply to those who would assert that Aboriginal people, like those of Brindleton, have "lost their culture." Using the concept "oppositional culture" she argues that Aboriginal people have not merely been passive clay to be molded by external forces, their culture destroyed by the colonizer. As the relatively powerless in the relationship of inequality, Aborigines have often had no choice but to acquiesce. Nevertheless, in responding to the events around them, sometimes with outright defiance, they have created a culture that is as distinctively Aboriginal as it is different from the culture of the people encountered by the first European settlers in western New South Wales.

I have several criticisms of Cowlshaw's book. While I am convinced by her analysis that it is white control of "the status criteria and the purse strings" that underlies the disadvantage of Aboriginal people, I do not think that her use of "class struggle" as a conceptual framework is particularly illuminating; indeed her analysis indicates the necessity of

developing a framework of "race relations" that goes beyond the concept of class. I also wish that Cowlshaw had written more about her fieldwork rather than limiting this topic to a few brief footnotes and sentences in the text. This is a book that demonstrates the interest and importance of such research. In not describing in greater detail the process of her work, Cowlshaw has missed an opportunity to assist in the development of similar studies. I would also like to say, though this is probably more a criticism intended for her editors than Cowlshaw herself, that the purpose and impact of her analysis of Brindleton is only realized upon reading the final chapter. In my opinion, this chapter should come first, and I urge readers to first turn to the back of the book.

These criticisms aside, *Black, White, or Brindle: Race in Rural Australia* is a thoughtful and thought-provoking book that invites us to imagine a world of greater equality and search for better ways to begin to achieve it.