

# Non-Indigenous people often ask: “What can I do?”

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**“Rather than seeking to come into our communities and 'help' us, you have a much more important role in your own community.”**

Since the beginning of the invasion of Australia to this very day there have always been non-Koori people who either felt disturbed by, or totally outraged by the treatment meted out to Australia's indigenous peoples. The problem for the Indigenous political movements has always been how to harness that support in a productive and meaningful way that could be of mutual benefit. As this essay has shown, it has not always been easy and nor indeed does it seem any easier today. Even among our most ardent supporters today there lurks an appalling degree of ignorance about history and Koori people, with even those who think they "know" being blinkered by either the traditional understanding of 'history' or the post-Hawke/Keating false history.

It is important therefore that the first thing a supporter of the Koori struggle must do is to shake off the myths of both the Right and the Left and to hear the alternative versions of history and memory that the Koori community offers. In putting yourself through such a process of self-education you should come to understand the tenuous nature of what is called history anyway. It is a question of understanding that Koori perceptions of space, time and meaning, necessarily conflict with the linear approach to history by the west. So too do our understandings of your political structures and institutions conflict with your perceptions, but you must understand our historical experience with those entities is what shapes our attitude toward them. In other words, if you are a member of a mainstream political party in Australia, then don't come to me pretending that your party can, or will, be of any real help to Aboriginal peoples' quest for Land Rights and economic independence. If anything, this essay should have shown why Koori people distrust all political parties.

If you can begin to understand Koori peoples' experience and encounters with the multitude of discourses that constitute non-Aboriginal Australia, then you can begin to see why it is so important for us to maintain our cultural and political integrity in our quest for justice. For the greater part of the last 200 years Koori peoples were denied control over their own destinies, both personally and collectively. It was only in the late 1960s that the chains began to loosen, but even to this day white society on many levels attempts to control and regulate the lives of Koori communities. These days more often than not the control is exercised through monies that are expended and the comprehensive conditions that are applied to the "grants". This is the reason many independent-minded Koori groups refuse government funding, which in turn is why non-

Koori support groups have an important role to play in supporting and assisting these Koori groups.

If you are a white supporter who objects to the sentiments expressed in this paper, or you have no concern for what Kooris think, then please feel free to go work for ATSIC, or any of the many government indigenous units, where you will find numerous employment opportunities (no experience or knowledge necessary) and become a card-carrying member of the Aboriginal industry.

On the other hand if you are the opposite type of person, then join a support group and take one step at a time, learning as you go. Make sure, however, that the group you join is one that genuinely supports Koori control of Koori affairs, and is in some way affiliated with, or taking guidance from, the local Koori traditional owners and/or local Koori community. In the meantime, explore the history I have outlined in this brief paper, as a greater understanding of these and associated historical events and personalities can only enhance not only your understanding of Koori peoples and Australian history, but also a better knowledge of your own society and thus yourself. As Ruth Frankenberg said,

Analysing the construction of whiteness is important as a means of reconceptualising the grounds on which white activists participate in anti-racist work.

This paper will not change the historical problems I have described, but I hope at best it has alerted you to another level of what you call history, and in doing so hopefully stimulated you to know more. A desire to know more can only be constructive because in the process of informing yourself you will discover the extraordinary level of ignorance and fear that exists even within your own immediate family and/or close circle of friends regarding indigenous issues. I hope that this realisation would then motivate you to challenge those attitudes among those close to you, because then you will begin to realise how deeply entrenched negative attitudes can be, and how difficult it is to overcome misconceptions, stereotypes and prejudice. This experience can only enhance your appreciation of the generations of struggle by Koori activists to counter the same problem.

Finally, you should come to the understanding that the real problem that confronts indigenous peoples is one which exists in the white community. Racism is only a problem that can be overcome by people who are part of the community in which it festers. By definition, the problem of white racism should be the primary focus of white support groups. Therefore the ultimate message of this paper is that rather than seeking to come into our communities and 'help' us, you have a much more important role in your own community. You should be daily challenging the ignorance and fear that constitute the greatest obstacle to Koori self-determination and independence. We can solve our own internal community problems, therefore it is up to you to change your society, not ours.

For those willing to accept this challenge and try, I salute you and wish you well.

*For more information about Gary Foley visit <http://www.kooriweb.org>*

*For more information on what **you** can do visit ANTaR Victoria's website [www.antarvictoria.org.au](http://www.antarvictoria.org.au)*