



Quarterly Essay 55 A Rightful Place: Race, recognition and a more complete commonwealth

Noel Pearson

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The nation has unfinished business. After more than two centuries, can a rightful place be found for Australia's original peoples?

Soon we will all decide if and how indigenous Australians will be recognised in the constitution. In the words of Professor Greg Craven: "We have a committed prime minister, and a committed opposition. We have a receptive electorate. There will never be a better time. We have no choice but to address the question. If constitutions deal with fundamental things, our indigenous heritage is pretty fundamental."

In *A Rightful Place*, Noel Pearson shows how the idea of "race" was embedded in the constitution, and the distorting effect this has had. Now there is a chance to change it – if we can agree on a way forward. Pearson shows what constitutional recognition means, and what it could make possible: true equality and a renewed appreciation of an ancient culture. This is a wide-ranging, eloquent call for justice, an essay of remarkable power that traverses history and culture to make the case for change.

"As long as we have a constitution that characterises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the basis of race, it will always have deleterious implications for their citizenship. It must be removed ... This is not just a matter of symbolism. I think this will be a matter of psychology. The day we come to regard ourselves as people with a distinct heritage, with distinct cultures and languages but not of a distinct race, will be a day of psychological liberation. And it will also be liberating for those in the wider community ..."

Noel Pearson, *A Rightful Place*

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