General Information

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</thead>
<tbody>
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Description

Australian Aborigines speak about their native traditions and the increasing presence of outside cultures in their Northern Australia home.

Keywords

Australia, Aborigine, Nomadic, Primitive, Aboriginal Culture, Yirrkala, Northern Territory, Indigenous, Native, Traditions, Yolngu, Missionaries

Citation

MLA

Transcript

A Profile of an Aboriginal Tribe in Northern Australia

JANE PAULEY reporting:

When the first white settlers landed here in Australia there were about 300,000 aborigines scattered across the continent. For these nomadic and primitive people the arrival of civilization was a disaster. Now 200 years later aboriginal culture survives. We went to Australia’s northern territory, a town called Yirrkala. It’s an aboriginal town where the people have maintained a body of tradition that may be the oldest on earth.

Dr. NANCY WILLIAMS:

These people are Yomu. And they’re the people who having been living here for perhaps 40,000 years. They are the people who are of the land, part of the land, the land is in them. That’s not just a mystical thing; that has real meaning in terms of economics, in terms of politics, in terms their customs, their traditions. They’re part of a whole, I don’t know of any people in the world of whom it’s more true that the whole culture is of a—the whole cloth. All the activities that are marked by being part of Yomu culture, Yomu tradition, are important to them. Fishing with spears, collecting shellfish, gathering bark for paintings, those aren’t just activities that they continue to do because of some romantic attachment to the past. They’re all part of Yomu learning about the resources of their environment, and learning how to use them, they are essential parts of Yomu culture.

GALARRWUY YUNUPINGU: [Yomu being spoken]. I remember the way that things were carried out in a—in a normal aboriginal way. I remember accompanying my mother by going into that billabong out there to collect lilies and everything else that needed to be collected. A long time before missionaries and everybody else ever came to this place, people never used to use clothes, never used to wear clothes at all. I mean it was just normal. That way of living is very quickly being eaten up. Aboriginal people are being pushed out, their land is being taken, their food’s being taken, they’re being physically killed off, and then the land is empty. It might be empty, but their spirit is still there, their memories are still there, their bones are there.

RAYMATTJA MUNUGGIRITJ: What I miss now is like in the old days the grandmother sitting around
the campfire telling us stories until we used to go to sleep. She sit there tell us stories about the land, about
the people. In the old days they used to really—like a big clan fight, like tribal fights, that sort of thing,
like what happened in the past. To my children, I want them to grow up to be really strong people. Strong
for the land, and strong for our culture.
YUNUPINGU: Aboriginal people live and die. So does everybody else. But, aboriginal people never die.
We physically die, but our spirit lives on.