

# “don’t take the bait in ’88: let’s educate!” – protest, celebration and education in Australia

Beth Marsden & Matthew R. Keynes

The article argues that educational protest offers a heuristic for understanding Indigenous political aspirations and politics in Australia. It analyses the celebrations and protests marking 150 and 200 years of European colonisation in Australia, in 1938 and 1988. Using Indigenous protest about education as an analytical and empirical frame, the paper explores how Indigenous protest drew attention to discriminatory policies, long-standing deficit narratives in curriculum, and Indigenous political aspirations. In doing so, the paper addresses a gap in research on debates about the celebration of settler nationalism in education which has typically focused on representations of Indigenous perspectives contra settler perspectives in curriculum texts or commemorative practices. This paper illustrates how paying attention to Indigenous protest, and the ways that public education and curriculum change are conceived and advocated, can shift attention to Indigenous political aspirations and the central place of education therein.

Keywords: activism, curriculum, Indigenous politics, protest, self-determination, settler colonialism

## Introduction

On 26 January 2025, Professor Gary Foley spoke from the steps of Victorian Parliament to a vast crowd gathered there to protest ‘Australia Day’: the national day of celebration to mark the beginning of British invasion of the continent. Foley told the protesters that “History has great lessons to teach us... I urge all of you to educate yourself about the history of the Aboriginal resistance so that you know your place in the ongoing struggle, a struggle that’s being going on since the day that Captain Cook set foot on this land” (Foley, 2025).<sup>1</sup> Contests over the celebration and protest of the colonisation of Australia have always been inextricably linked to education, public and school based. This paper analyses the celebrations and protests marking 150 and 200 years of European colonisation in Australia, in 1938 and 1988. It examines how public education and school curriculum were used to further the nationalist and imperialist aims of the celebrations. It also examines how protests against the celebrations presented Indigenous-led counter narratives about Australian history and politics. In doing so, it addresses a gap in research on debates about the celebration of settler nationalism in education. These have tended to concentrate on representations of Indigenous contra settler perspectives in curriculum texts or commemorative practices but have not yet prioritised Indigenous protest about education as an analytical and empirical frame (Cook & Goodall, 2013; Culpit, 2021; Foley, 1997; Sharp, 2011). Attending to the ways that Indigenous-led protests have contested and conceptualised education affords new insights into these long-standing political debates (Keynes et al., 2023; Marsden, 2023a). This paper argues that educational protest offers a heuristic for understanding Indigenous political aspirations and politics in Australia.

Specifically, the paper explores how schools, school curriculum and public educational programs have been deployed both by proponents of nationalism and those who have protested settler nationalism to different effects. The marginalisation of Indigenous people’s perspectives and experiences within the dominant, nationalistic narratives of European colonisation of the Australian continent, has been a pervasive characteristic of public commemoration and school curriculum alike. The discriminatory nature of Australian curriculum – especially history curriculum – has been well established by historians, and in the accounts of Indigenous people (Keynes et al., 2023; Heiss, 2017, pp. 14, 88, 117, 122, 137). Importantly, the two cases examined in this paper are not isolated instances but instead represent flashpoints in a longer history of strikes, protests, boycotts and campaigns against settler nationalist commemoration and curriculum, that punctuate Aboriginal politics, education and activism.

## Contesting Curriculum in Australia

School curriculum in Australia has been contested since the establishment of government schools from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. This has included protests in the 1920s by unions over representations of war in the curriculum, in the 1930s by teachers against out-dated and unpopular curriculum, and campaigns in the 1960s led by parent associations against the inclusion of mandatory scripture lessons in social studies (*Argus*, 1935, p. 13; *Daily Mail*, 1920, p. 6; *Telegraph*, 1938, p. 15; *Tribune*, 1960, p. 10). Newspaper reports show the varied issues raised by different groups for inclusion in the curriculum: “Vegetable Growing Urged as School Subject”, “Plans for Music in School Curriculum”; “Swimming Should Be on School Curriculum”, and “Boxing in State Schools: A Methodist Protest” (*Canberra Times*, 1983, p. 2; *Daily Herald*, 1914, p. 5; *Mercury*, 1950, p. 7). The most politicised contests, however, have typically been in relation to ‘core’ subjects: English, maths, science, and from the interwar period especially, Australian history.

In the academic scholarship, debate has focused on the inclusion/exclusion of Aboriginal histories, knowledge, culture and perspectives and their representations in school curricula. There has not yet been significant attention paid to contests over curriculum initiated by Aboriginal people. Most contemporary scholarship focuses on debates over the inclusion of more ‘Aboriginal history’ in state and national curriculum, especially since the introduction of the latter in 2010. That body of scholarship, for the most part, does not consider how Aboriginal communities and campaigns have historically contested the curriculum.<sup>2</sup> There is a long history of Aboriginal people contesting the curriculum, albeit in ways that may not have been recognised or acknowledged by the settler public.<sup>3</sup> The 1938 and 1988 celebrations and protests analysed in this article, invite consideration of how Aboriginal-led campaigns for curriculum change have advocated Aboriginal perspectives on the anniversary of British settlement in 1938 and 1988 respectively. In doing so, our aim is to build upon the established scholarship by redirecting attention to the ways that Aboriginal political protests attempted to influence curriculum, and mobilised curriculum for their own political purposes.

### 1938: The Sesquicentenary and the Day of Mourning Protest

In 1938, the Australian government and the majority non-Indigenous society celebrated the 150-year anniversary of the British invasion of the Australian continent. The formal celebrations spanned 3 months and saw numerous celebratory activities around the country. The focus was on 26 January, ‘Australia Day’, the date in 1788 when the British Governor Arthur Philip established a settlement at Sydney Cove. The 1938 celebrations on this date included re-enactment of the landing

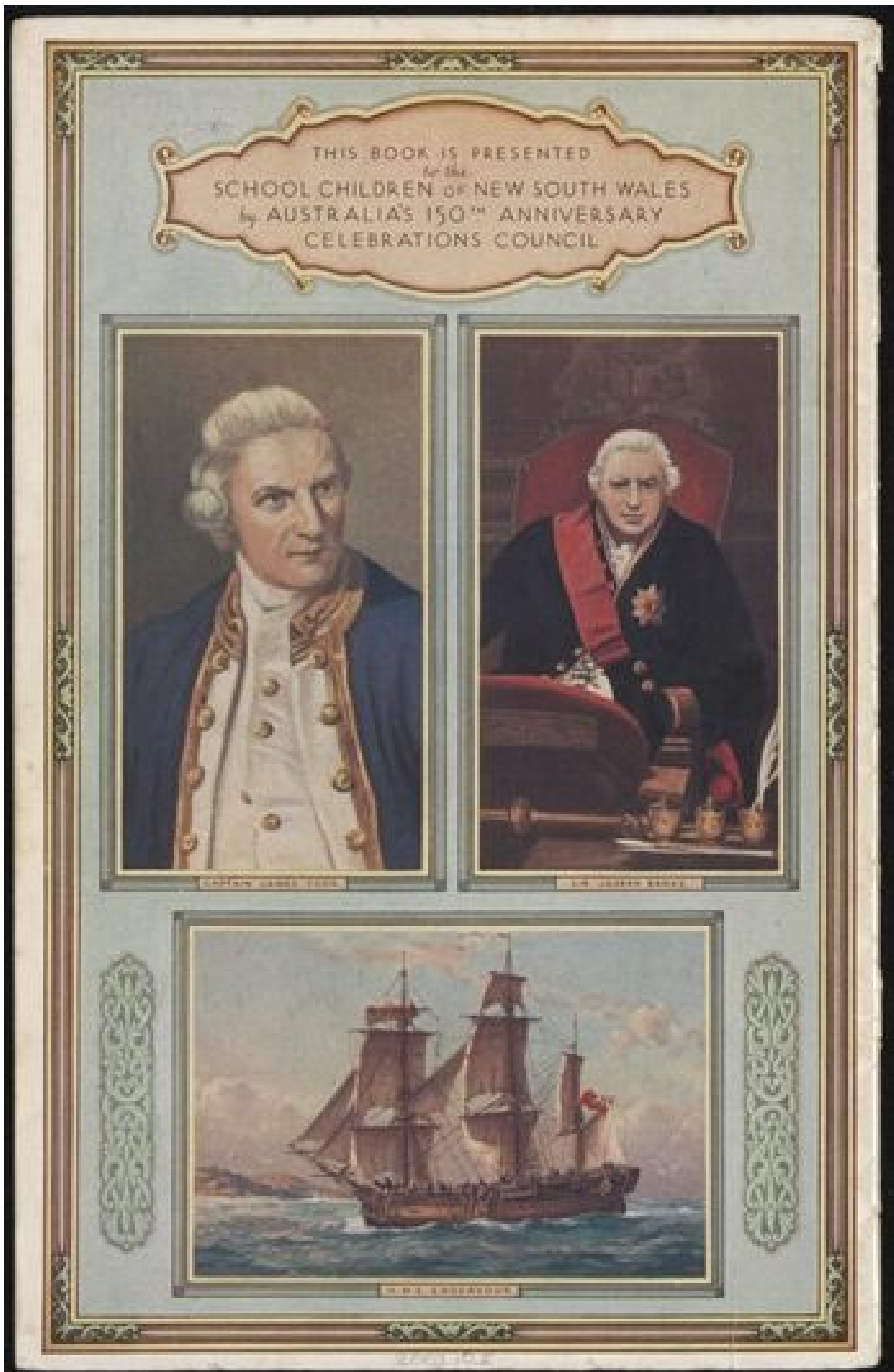
of the First Fleet on the beach and a parade through the streets of Sydney. Elsewhere in the city, a group of Aboriginal people protested the celebrations. They used the term ‘Day of Mourning’ to counter the celebratory ‘Australia Day’. The protesters later organised an Aboriginal-only conference, where several resolutions were passed. These included demands for citizenship rights, equality in the community, and policy reform (Patten & Ferguson, 1938, p. 1).

The 1938 celebration and protest had implications for public education and schooling. The celebratory narratives of the sesquicentenary reinforced the dominant narratives of colonisation and peaceful settlement that shaped non-Indigenous Australians’ understanding of themselves and the settler nation.

These narratives were promoted through curricular materials developed for use in government schools. In addition to the program of firework displays, official ceremonies, and musical performance, schools were used as key sites to promote the 1938 sesquicentenary celebrations. The states, responsible for school systems and curriculum, each developed their own ways to promote the celebrations (Bedford et al., 2023). In New South Wales the compulsory reader, ‘The School Magazine’ published to coincide with the 1938 celebrations included a range of extracts, poems, songs all celebrating the arrival of the British, and the settlers and pioneers who followed. Only one extract referred to Aboriginal people: as “natives”, who were armed but “easily persuaded” (*School Magazine*, 1938, p. 3). The celebratory issue also included a “special letter” from the Director of Education to all school children, encouraging them to “give honour and praise to the early colonists”, and to “remember with pride those who laboured” to build the “nation as it grew in stature” (Thomas, 1938, p. 2). School children were also targeted by external bodies. Australia’s 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations Council presented all school children in New South Wales a copy of the “Historic Retrospect on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of Australia”, that detailed the story of Australia’s ‘Discovery and Progress’ through a series of vignettes focused on the progress of white male British explorers and colonial administrators. This reinforced the education departments’ messaging (Leigh & Co, 1938).

### **Figure 1**

*An historic retrospect on the occasion of the 150th anniversary celebrations of the founding of Australia*



Note: The back cover of an historic retrospect on the occasion of the 150th anniversary celebrations of the

*founding of Australia*' – colour publication printed for the 150th anniversary celebrations of Australia, 1938, designed for school children of New South Wales to mark the sesquicentenary of European settlement in Australia, T Leigh & Co Pty Ltd, reproduced with permission of the National Museum Australia.

## Figure 2

*The Day of Mourning protest in Sydney*



*Note:* The Day of Mourning protest in Sydney, on 26 January 1938. From left to right: William Ferguson, Jack Kinchela, Isaac Ingram, Doris Williams, Esther Ingram, Arthur Williams, Phillip Ingram, Louisa Agnes Ingram OAM holding daughter Olive Ingram, and Jack Patton. Reproduced with permission of the Mitchell Library NSW.

The 1938 Day of Mourning protest presented a compelling counter-narrative to the story of British invasion and colonisation that was being promoted publicly and in schools. The protest drew attention to frontier violence, ongoing discrimination, loss of land and repressive legislation and policies. Protest organisers, Jack Patten and Bill Ferguson, issued a pamphlet, *Aborigines Claim Citizens Rights!* that explained the extent of government control over Aboriginal people, and “callous treatment of our people by the whitemen during the past 150 years” (Patten & Ferguson, 1938, p. 1). It appealed to a public audience, urging settler Australians to “Give our children the same chances as your own, and they will do as well as your children!” (Patten & Ferguson, 1938, p. 9). Patten’s speeches further stressed educational access for Aboriginal children, calling on the government to “make new laws for the education and care” of Aboriginal people, including full citizenship rights.

The Day of Mourning campaign was a masterclass in public pedagogy. By drawing attention to the ways that Aboriginal people viewed British colonisation of their lands, the demonstration punctured the overwhelmingly celebratory accounts of colonisation. Numerous reports published in

newspapers around the country recognised this perspective: under headlines such as ‘Day of Mourning’: Aboriginal Viewpoint’, and ‘Aboriginal Outlook To Celebrations’, ‘What Past 150 Years Has Meant to Them’ (*The Age*, 1938, p. 17; *Mercury*, 1938, p. 9; *Truth*, 1938, p. 16).

Beyond this recognition of alternate perspectives, however, the broader political aims of the protest found little purchase with the government of the time and resulted in no structural changes. Yet the Day of Mourning protest shows how educational claims were mobilised by the protesters, and that education was a site through which Indigenous people challenged the ambitions of the celebrations. It demonstrates the long-standing importance of public education in Indigenous-led protests that seek to re-educate the settler public, whose knowledge of Indigenous people and colonisation has been shaped largely through nationalistic curriculum, media reportage, and political discourse.

The Day of Mourning also demonstrates how Aboriginal leaders articulated demands for better education for their children. At this time, in 1938, segregated, inferior schooling, typically offering a truncated curriculum focused on vocational and manual labour training, was often the only option available for Aboriginal families (Fletcher, 1989). Around the country, white communities were advocating the exclusion of Aboriginal children from government schools, meaning that many Aboriginal communities had no access to any schooling at all (Marsden, 2023b; NIYEC, 2024; Parry & Wells, 1997; Theobald, 2001). Aboriginal families, communities and leaders had campaigned for greater access to schooling and academic education prior to 1938 (Haebich, 1992, pp. 141-144). William Cooper, who was instrumental in the 1938 Day of Mourning protest, wrote to the government that: “our children should get the full opportunity of attaining the fullest primary education and for secondary education. Our people say that they want their children to be able to become doctors, nurses, teachers” (Cooper, 1936). Cooper’s aspirations for the education of Aboriginal children were still decades away from being realised. It was not until the 1970s that the formal exclusion of Aboriginal children from schools and academic courses ended. Yet the omission and marginalisation of Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum meant that forms of exclusion continued, even as Indigenous children were more readily included in classrooms.

## 1988: The Bicentennial and Year of Mourning

In 1988, fifty years later, most of Australian society was preparing to celebrate another milestone: the 200-year bicentenary of British invasion. By 1988, the education situation for Indigenous students had changed significantly from 1938. There were no longer formal structures in place that allowed for the exclusion of Aboriginal students from government schools. The contest over education had shifted to focus more on the content of the curriculum, the experiences of Aboriginal students in classrooms, and the training of Indigenous teachers.

Indigenous educators led much of this change. This was supported by some government reform including the establishment of the National Aboriginal Education Committee in 1975 (Holt, 2021, p. 34). Grassroots organisations such as the Koori Kollij in Melbourne, Tranby in Sydney, and bilingual schools in the Northern Territory, were also instrumental in developing curriculum by and for Aboriginal communities (Cook & Goodall, 2013; Goodall et al., 2023; Thomas, 2023; Woodcock et al. 2023). Despite this, First Nations people continued to experience ongoing educational disadvantage (Holt, 2021, p. 135). Systemic discrimination and racism in government schools remained a significant problem for many Indigenous students. In May 1982, for instance, more than one-third of Aboriginal students in NSW boycotted school in protest at the failure of the NSW Education Department to address a racist incident at the Bourke High School earlier in the



year. Aboriginal leaders met with the Director General of Education, and a group of around 50 Aboriginal people presented a list of demands. These included more Aboriginal teachers in schools, and ‘the elimination of all racist material from schools’, including in textbooks (*Tribune*, 1983, p. 2).

The 1988 bicentennial celebration, like the sesquicentenary, was marked by a celebratory frenzy, promoted on television, radio and in schools. One of the authors was a primary school student at the time: it seemed that the ‘Let’s celebrate in 88’ slogan was everywhere, and the celebrations felt like a fantastic invitation. Planning for the bicentennial started in 1979, with the establishment of the Australian Bicentennial Authority (ABA) which was given responsibility to develop the ‘focus’ of the celebrations. The ABA contracted marketing firms to handle the \$10.5 million advertising campaign, which aimed at motivating public engagement. Despite some hesitancy and concern that items in the program might cause offence to Indigenous people, the ABA organised a plethora of sporting events, building works, displays and exhibitions, all carried out with pomp and circumstance.

In terms of formal standards in school history education, secondary school history was not a mandatory subject in New South Wales until 1998 (Dallimore & Condie, 2022). As Bedford et al. (2023) have shown, there was little uniformity before that time. Likewise, in Victoria history was part of an integrated social education curriculum throughout the 1980s-1990s (Marsh, 2005). For Queensland in 1987, the senior history syllabus offered a ‘lukewarm’ and deficit approach to history. Content included ‘the destruction of Aboriginal society’ and no recognition of the resilience of contemporary Aboriginal politics and society (Bedford et al., 2023, p. 25). Concerning primary education in Queensland, Heather Sharp has shown that the 1988 social studies curriculum presented ‘knowledge’ of Aboriginal people as being of ‘general interest’, instead of providing opportunities for meaningful engagement (Sharp, 2023, p. 191).

Schools and children were central to the ABA’s plans. Schools featured heavily in narratives of celebration and positivity about European settlement promoted emphatically by the ABA. From 1980, the ABA’s monthly newsletter regularly included articles showing smiling children engaged in bicentennial activities. This included a group of children from a school in Sydney working on ‘a magnificent collage’ of the First Fleet to be displayed in the ABA offices (ABA, 1981, p. 2). Another shows children from a primary school in Alice Springs standing near the ‘Bicentennial Wishing Tree’ they had constructed (ABA, 1985, p. 7). As 1988 drew closer, the ABA produced a *Bicentennial Teachers’ Manual* and *Bicentennial Resource Kits*, and commemorative materials for students. The programme for school involvement was based on the idea that schools should “be vitally involved in celebrations during 1988 and the participation of school children will be a foundation of the joy and success of the Bicentenary” (ABA, 1988, p. 7). The ABA did not seem to take account of the fact that, for Aboriginal students, forced participation in in bicentennial activities at school might be unwelcome. The 1988 celebrations marking invasion and colonisation (and those that have followed each year) were deeply hurtful, denied history, and elided the continuing disadvantage faced by Indigenous people.

### Figure 3

*Cover of Bicentennial Memento for school students 1988*



*Note:* The Australian mint produced 3.2 million medals, for presentation to every school student in Australia.

### Protesting the Bicentennial Through Education

The 1988 Australia Day celebrations were protested by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The largest demonstration took place in Sydney, where more than 40,000 Aboriginal people from all over the country converged, alongside non-Aboriginal supporters, to protest, particularly the re-enactment of the landing at Sydney Cove. The protests were a celebration of survival, an assertion of sovereignty, and mode of educating the non-Aboriginal society about the truth of colonisation, and the harm caused by celebrating the dispossession of Aboriginal people. Building on the 1938 protests, some organisers labelled 1988 as the ‘Year of Mourning’: protest signs read “What’s There to Celebrate?”, “We Have Survived”, “White Australia has a Black History” (Kinnane, 2023).

#### Figure 4

*Aboriginal protest Tasmania 1988*





Note: Aboriginal protest Tasmania 1988, Flickr.

Like the 1938 Day of Mourning, by appealing to the public to consider Indigenous perspectives, the 1988 protests had a significant impact on Australia's national understanding. The considerable involvement of non-Indigenous protestors also illustrated that public consciousness had shifted since 1938. Organisers used the media, unions and education to communicate their messages, and draw media and public attention. The success of this strategy can be measured by the plethora of media reports. The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that "scarcely a day of the Bicentenary has passed when issues involving Aborigines and their 'Year of Mourning' protest have not featured prominently" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1988). Ali Baker, who was 12 years old at the time, travelled to Sydney with her family. She recalled that "for the first time we felt that we were not alone and that there were other people who cared about us and our history" (Flinders University, 2014). Public sentiment against the celebrations were bolstered by a groundswell of bitter disappointment caused by the winding back of promises made by then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, to deliver land rights to Aboriginal people (Keynes et al., 2023; Parkes, 2007).<sup>4</sup> Activists sought to redirect attention from the bicentennial to the immediate needs of Aboriginal communities, including the disproportionately high levels of incarceration and deaths in custody, and the need for land rights and treaty (Gilbert, 1993).

The protests on 26 January were a highly visual demonstration of resistance to the bicentennial celebrations. But protest action was also unfolding in the educational domain. In the years leading up to 1988, Aboriginal communities, educators and organisations were highly active in education, schooling and curriculum development (Bourke, 1992). One prominent example of the effects of this agitation, was the response of the Australian Teachers Federation (ATF). The ATF took up the imperative to change the way that Australian history was being taught and the ways colonisation was being celebrated in government schools, passing a resolution in 1986 that called for members to boycott school bicentennial programs that did not include Aboriginal peoples' perspectives on the celebrations. As Tony Amatto, one of the ATF's Aboriginal Education Coordinators, wrote, the curriculum was deeply inadequate because it was possible for students to finish school "without having any real understanding of Aboriginal people, Aboriginal history of the Aboriginal culture both before and after 1788" (Amatto, 1988, p. 9). He suggested that delegates had probably been teaching their students that "Captain Cook discovered Australia" (Amatto, 1988, p.9). The 1988 celebration and protest spurred the ATF to address this directly. They produced materials on the history of Australia from an Aboriginal perspective for use in schools (NSW Teachers Assoc., 1988, p. 11). They also vowed to support union members who chose to refuse teaching curriculum without an Aboriginal perspective, and those who joined Aboriginal-organised protests in solidarity.

The ATF also platformed Aboriginal educators to speak directly to members on the issues at hand, including improving curriculum. At the annual conference of 1988, just prior to the Australia Day celebrations, Pat Fowell, Aboriginal Education Coordinator, addressed the conference. Echoing the words of William Cooper in 1938, Fowell said "We need community administrators, doctors, nurses, lawyers, educators, teachers, the whole range of professional people..." She told the conference that teachers had the potential to effect positive change for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. She said "One doesn't have to exaggerate or embellish, just teach Australian history by telling what happened to Aboriginal and Islander people because of the European occupation, how this society lived before 1788, what effects this has had on Aboriginal society today. Be positive: our history, is yours as well, respect it, teach it, be reconciled to it" (Fowell, 1988, pp. 14-16).

Indigenous organisers also drew attention to the need for curriculum change, depending on the needs of their communities. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated provided a statement for the *Bicentennial Teachers Manual for Victoria*, which directed teachers to include Aboriginal history or culture, to always include Aboriginal perspectives, and to "change negative attitudes and counter the effects of biased and ill-informed material" (Bamblett, 1988). They also asserted their refusal to celebrate. In the Northern Territory, the Northern Land Council, based in Darwin, and the Central Land Council, based in Alice Springs, produced a special, anti-bicentenary issue of their newsletter, printing 40,000 copies for distribution at the Sydney protest. It featured an article 'Why education needs change', linking the celebrations to the failure of the curriculum, and asserting the need for Aboriginal curriculum (Central Land Council & Northern Land Council, 1988, p. 3). Other organisations developed campaigns targeting schools, and more specifically, the way that the bicentenary was being taught and celebrated in Australian classrooms. Grassroots organisations developed targeted educational material to counter government-produced school materials and programs. Some organisations also produced materials to be used in schools. In Sydney, for example, the Bicentennial Protest Committee produced a video on racism in schools to challenge a government video which suggested that Australia was a harmonious, multicultural society. Their *Bicentennial Protest Kit* suggested slogans to be used as part of the protests, such as "Don't Take the Bait in '88: Let's Educate!" (Tranby Aboriginal College, 1988).

## Conclusion: Educational Legacies of the 1938 and 1988 Protests

The 1938 and 1988 celebrations and protests continue to influence both public and school education. Support for abolishing the celebration of Australia's national date on the anniversary of invasion also continues to grow, as visibly demonstrated through protests in Australian capital cities, on what organisers and their supporters refer to as Invasion Day or Survival Day (Bach, 2023). Indigenous organisers and speakers at those protests routinely identify public education, and changes to the school system, as an ongoing concern. The need for people to educate themselves beyond school systems is a common refrain: speaking at the 2019 protest in Melbourne, for example, Gary Foley told the crowd if they educated themselves about the history of Australia, and educated ten other people, "next year we would have half of Melbourne on our side" (Foley, 2019).

The 1938 Day of Mourning protest has become a touchstone for the annual protests. Recognised as a pivotal moment that contested the settler-nationalist narrative of history on the Australian content, the protest has, since 2023, been included in the national curriculum for History, with the 1938 Day of Mourning provided as an example of a First Nations campaign for rights and freedoms (ACARA, 2023). The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum is an ongoing project. In 2010, the Australian National Curriculum was introduced, and included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as one of three cross-curriculum priorities (CCP). Designed to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are taught across all curriculum areas, the transformative potential of the CCP continues to be debated considering rising racism in Australian society and the recent failure of the 'Voice' referendum (Lowe et al., 2025). Indigenous leaders and communities continue to call out education systems for their failure to accurately represent the long history of Indigenous cultures and the ongoing struggle against settler colonialism. This paper has illustrated how paying attention to Indigenous protest, and the ways that public education and curriculum change are conceived and advocated, can shift attention to Indigenous political aspirations and the central place of education therein.

## Reference

- Australian Bicentenary Authority. (1981, October). *Bicentenary '88* (Vol. 1, No. 4), 2.
- Australian Bicentenary Authority. (1985a). *Bicentenary '88* (Special Issue, Vol. 4, No. 2), 7.
- Australian Bicentenary Authority. (1985b, February). *Bicentenary '88* (Vol. 5, No. 1), 7.
- Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2023). *Australian curriculum: History*. [https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/learning-areas/history-7-10/year-9\\_year-10?view=quick&detailed-content-descriptions=0&hide-ccp=0&hide-gc=0&side-by-side=1&strands-start-index=0](https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/learning-areas/history-7-10/year-9_year-10?view=quick&detailed-content-descriptions=0&hide-ccp=0&hide-gc=0&side-by-side=1&strands-start-index=0)
- Bach, M. (2023, January 24). Change the date? Let's change the curriculum first to address widespread ignorance of Australia's history. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jan/24/change-the-date-day-curriculum-ignorance-australia-history>
- Bambllett, P. (1988). Aboriginal education and the Australian Bicentenary in Victorian schools. In *Australia Close-Up: Bicentennial Teachers Manuals Victoria* (Ministry of Education, Schools

Division).

Bedford, M. K., Baguley, M., & Maddock, D. (2023). The very marrow of the national idea: The frontier wars and the Australian curriculum. *Historical Encounters*, 10(2), 22–37.

“Blacks boycott schools.” (1982, May 5). *Tribune* (Sydney), 2.

Bourke, C. (2023). Creating the future from the past: Aboriginal curriculum. *Kaurna Higher Education Journal*, 19(3), 10–16.

“Boxing in state schools: A Methodist protest.” (1914, July 3). *Daily Herald* (Adelaide), 5.

Central Land Council & Northern Land Council. (1988, January). Land rights now, 3.

Cooper, to the Premier, Mr. Stevens, of NSW. (1936, November 15). *New South Wales State Archives and Records* (NSWSAR), NRS 905, A1000 [2/7584.1].

Cook, K., & Goodall, H. (2013). *Making change happen: Black and white activists talk to Kevin Cook about Aboriginal, union, and liberation politics*. ANU Press.

Culpit, E. (2021). Radio Redfern: 26 January 1988. *Aboriginal History*, 45, 33–55.

Dallimore, J., & Condie, M. (2022). Fifty years of 7-10 history in New South Wales: An overview. *Teaching History*, 56(1), 34.

“Day of mourning: Aboriginal viewpoint.” (1938, January 27). *The Age* (Melbourne), 17.

“Day of mourning; Aboriginal outlook to celebrations.” (1938, January 27). *The Mercury* (Hobart), 9.

“Day of mourning for Aborigines: What past 150 years has meant to them.” (1938, January 23). *Truth* (Sydney), 16.

Fletcher, J. (1989). *Clean, clad and courteous: A history of Aboriginal education in New South Wales*. J. Fletcher.

Flinders University. (2014, March 4). ‘88 documentary shows Flinders links with bicentennial protest.

<https://news.flinders.edu.au/blog/2014/03/04/88-documentary-shows-flinders-links-with-bicentennial-protest/>

Foley, G. (1997, May). The Sydney Morning Herald and representations of the 1988 Bicentennial. *Koorie Web*.

Foley, G. (2019, January 26). Huge crowds attend Invasion Day marches across Australia’s capital cities. *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jan/26/huge-crowds-attend-invasion-day-marches-across-australias-capital-cities>

Foley, G. (2025, January 26). Personal recording belonging to the authors, Melbourne.

Gilbert, K. (1993). *Aboriginal sovereignty, justice, the law and land: Including draft treaty*. Burrumbinga Books.

Goodall, H., Norman, H., Russon, B., & Belevi, C. (2023). *Around the meeting tree: Tranby history 1980-2000*.

<http://aroundthemeetingtree.com>

Haebich, A. (1992). *For their own good: Aborigines and government in the southwest of Western Australia, 1900-1940*. University of Western Australia Press.

Heiss, A. (Ed.). (2017). *Growing up Aboriginal in Australia*. Black Inc.

Holt, L. (2021). *Talking strong: The National Aboriginal Educational Committee and the development of Aboriginal educational policy*. Aboriginal Studies Press.

Keynes, M. R., Marsden, B., & Thomas, A. (2023). Does curriculum fail Indigenous political aspirations? Sovereignty and Australian history and social studies curriculum. *Nordic Journal of Educational History*, 10(2), 59–83.

Kinnane, S. (2023). 1988 Bicentenary protest. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

<https://adb.anu.edu.au/the-quest-for-indigenous-recognition/the-bicentenary#:~:text=Blackfellas%20from%20all%20over%20shared>

Lowe, K., Golledge, C., Poulton, P. et al. (2025). Curriculum as policy deception: a critical analysis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge inclusion in the Australian Curriculum. *Australian Educational Researcher*.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-025-00824-6>

Marsden, B. (2023a). ‘Our people say that they want their children to be able to become doctors, nurses, teachers’: Contesting education and schooling for Aboriginal children in south-eastern Australia in the 1930s. *History of Education*, 52(5).

Marsden, B. (2023b). *Histories of Aboriginal education and schooling in Victoria 1904-1968* (PhD thesis). La Trobe University.

Marsh, C. J. (2005). Have we put our best foot forward: A comparative and historical stocktake of social studies. *Social Educator*, 23(3).

National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC). (2024). *The school exclusion project*.

Parkes, R. (2007). Reading history curriculum as postcolonial text: Towards a curricular response to the history wars in Australia and beyond. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 37(4), 383–400.

Parry, S., & Wells, J. (1997). Schooling for assimilation: Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory, 1939-1955. *History of Education Review*, 26(2), 49–63.

“Protest by parents: Technical school transfers.” (1935, December 12). *The Argus* (Melbourne), 13.

“Protest over syllabus change.” (1960, July 20). *Tribune* (Sydney), 10.





“Quality of schooling impeded by current educational philosophy.” (1983, July 28). *The Canberra Times*, 2.

“School curriculum: Trades Hall protest.” (1920, June 10). *The Daily Mail* (Brisbane), 6.

Sharp, H. (2011). Australia’s 1988 Bicentennial: National history and multiculturalism in the primary school curriculum. *History of Education*, 41(3), 405–421.

Sharp, H. (2023). What we teach our children: A comparative analysis of Indigenous Australians in social studies curriculum, from the 1960s to the 1980s. *Historia Social y de la Educación*, 2(2).

Theobald, M. (2001). The Afghan children of Oodnadatta: A reflection on gender, ethnicity and education in the interwar years. *Pedagogica Historica*, 37(1), 211–230.

Thomas, A. (2023). ‘We wanted to be boss’: Self-determination, Indigenous governance and the Yipirinya School. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 55(3), 257–273.

Thomas, G. R. (1938). Director of education. *The School Magazine of Literature for Our Boys and Girls* (Vol. 23, No. 1, Part 4, Class 6), 2.

“Teacher makes plea for immediate reform in school curriculum.” (1938, January 19). *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 15.

Woodcock, S., Foley, G., Land, C., Bracks, W., Brown, A., Hawkes, J., & Ritchie, N. (2023). Black power education in Melbourne: Koori Kollij in historical context. *Histories of Place and People*, 18(1–2), 66–85.

“World focus on Aborigines.” Editorial. (1988, January 19). *Sydney Morning Herald*.

“Vegetable growing urged as school subject.” (1950, July 21). *The Mercury* (Hobart), 7.

## Recommended Citation

Marsden, B., & Keynes, M. R. (2025). ‘Don’t take the bait in ’88!’: Protest, celebration and education in Australia. *On Education. Journal for Research and Debate*, 8(21).

[https://doi.org/10.17899/on\\_ed.2025.21.6](https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2025.21.6)

Do you want to comment on this article? Please send your reply to [editors@oneducation.net](mailto:editors@oneducation.net). Replies will be processed like invited contributions. This means they will be assessed according to standard criteria of quality, relevance, and civility. Please make sure to follow editorial policies and formatting [guidelines](#).

### Beth Marsden

Dr. Beth Marsden is a non-Indigenous historian and McKenzie Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne.





## Matthew R. Keynes

Dr. Matthew R. Keynes is a non-Indigenous historian and McKenzie Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne.

1. Gary Foley, personal recording belonging to the authors, 26 January 2025, Melbourne.
2. In their overview of the Years 7-10 History syllabus in New South Wales, from 1972-2022, Jonathon Dallimore and Michael Condie note that debates about how Australian history should be represented surrounding the Bicentenary influenced the 1992 iteration of the syllabus, but stop short of identifying Aboriginal-led campaigns as a contributing factor. See (Dallimore & Condie, 2022, p. 34)
3. The suggestion of Bedford et al in their 2023 paper that the previous 35 years had seen education positioned as a site of contest elides the challenges made by Aboriginal people prior to 1988. See (Bedford et al., 2023, p. 24)
4. This was further buoyed by the emergence of new historiography in the 1980s that attended more closely to Indigenous perspectives and experiences of colonisation. See (Parkes, 2007).