



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2328/27231>

This is a scan of a document number DUN/Speeches/2599
in the Dunstan Collection, Special Collections, Flinders University Library.
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/library/info/collections/special/dunstan/>

Title:
Speech launching "White on Black" - Art Gallery

Please acknowledge the source as:
Dunstan Collection, Flinders University Library.
Identifier: DUN/Speeches/2599

© Copyright Estate Donald Allan Dunstan

SPEECH BY THE PREMIER, MR DUNSTAN, LAUNCHING "WHITE ON BLACK".

ART GALLERY. 11.3.74

Mr Dutton, Mr Baily, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you very much for inviting me here this evening.

I think it must be because Geoff Dutton is a publisher as well as a writer that his books have a way of being timely in addition to being good.

This is notably true of "White on Black" coming as it does at a time when debate on white-black relations in this country rages furious.

That's not new, of course. It was possibly the first topic of conversation at the first settlers' dinner table in New South Wales and it's been a perennial since then.

But it is only in recent years that it has taken on a new dimension as white Australians have moved from the oppression of black, through paternalism towards a recognition of the need for restitution. Painfully and reluctantly we came to see a new view of our history - one where we weren't cast as easy-going, virtuous and non-racist in an heroic mould but were regarded as racist, oppressors, exploiters and villains.

It was a terribly difficult view to accept - indeed, many still don't accept it - but the evidence was persuasive.

And with it came a high resolve to atone, to do something to expunge the shame that was the history of European Australia's confrontation with Aboriginal Australia.

There were shining ideals, new policies and great hopes. But lately that seems to have soured.

The debates rage but ominous new phrases have entered it - black power and white backlash. The reputations of good men are imperilled. Guns are talked about and one is brandished. Words of anger turn into bitterness, hope into disillusion.

This is something which must be resisted.

I believe it is vital for the wellbeing of this nation that we press on as fast as possible with the reforms that have been planned.

Morally, we can do no less.

The black Australians now raising their voices are angry, impatient and frustrated. They're tired of promises, tired of being given the run around. There can be absolutely no question of condoning violence, or the threat of it, but we must understand how they feel and we must respond - with sympathy and with action.

I think we have reason for pride in what we've done here in South Australia. We were the first to legislate to outlaw racial discrimination, we took a lead in the land rights question through

the creation - again by Statute - of the Aboriginal Lands Trust. Only last week it was announced that the third of our reserves - Point McLeay - is to be handed over to the Trust. But here, too, we can't afford any let up. We have to meet the needs of black Australians - as they perceive them. We can't impose policies, however well intentioned. That has been shown not to work.

There are no easy answers, no instant solutions.

The need, as I see it, is for Governments - across Australia though more in its north east than elsewhere - to be sensitive to the needs of Aborigines, alert in meeting them and somewhat thick-skinned about the things that are said about them.

There is a wrong to be righted.

This exhibition and this book depict just how great a wrong it was - the sentimental white view of Aboriginal Australians is as offensive as the racist. There are plenty examples of both.

Geoff Dutton then has done us a signal favour. He and Macmillans have produced a beautiful book and one which bears a message we can't ignore. Festival exhibitions and performances are necessarily ephemeral. It's most fitting, therefore, that this should be one of its permanent memorials and that it should be the work of an eminent South Australian.

SPEECH BY THE PREMIER, MR DUNSTAN, LAUNCHING "WHITE ON BLACK".

ART GALLERY. 11.3.74

Mr Dutton, Mr Baily, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you very much for inviting me here this evening.

I think it must be because Geoff Dutton is a publisher as well as a writer that his books have a way of being timely in addition to being good.

This is notably true of "White on Black" coming as it does at a time when debate on white-black relations in this country rages furious. That's not new, of course. It was possibly the first topic of conversation at the first settlers' dinner table in New South Wales and it's been a perennial since then.

But it is only in recent years that it has taken on a new dimension as white Australians have moved from the oppression of black, through paternalism towards a recognition of the need for restitution. Painfully and reluctantly we came to see a new view of our history - one where we weren't cast as easy-going, virtuous and non-racist in an heroic mould but were regarded as racist, oppressors, exploiters and villains.

It was a terribly difficult view to accept - indeed, many still don't accept it - but the evidence was persuasive.

And with it came a high resolve to atone, to do something to expunge the shame that was the history of European Australia's confrontation with Aboriginal Australia.

There were shining ideals, new policies and great hopes.

But lately that seems to have soured.

The debates rage but ominous new phrases have entered it - black power and white backlash. The reputations of good men are imperilled. Guns are talked about and one is brandished. Words of anger turn into bitterness, hope into disillusion.

This is something which must be resisted.

I believe it is vital for the wellbeing of this nation that we press on as fast as possible with the reforms that have been planned.

Morally, we can do no less.

The black Australians now raising their voices are angry, impatient and frustrated. They're tired of promises, tired of being given the run around. There can be absolutely no question of condoning violence, or the threat of it, but we must understand how they feel and we must respond - with sympathy and with action.

I think we have reason for pride in what we've done here in South Australia. We were the first to legislate to outlaw racial discrimination, we took a lead in the land rights question through

the creation - again by Statute - of the Aboriginal Lands Trust. Only last week it was announced that the third of our reserves - Point McLeay - is to be handed over to the Trust. But here, too, we can't afford any let up. We have to meet the needs of black Australians - as they perceive them. We can't impose policies, however well intentioned. That has been shown not to work.

There are no easy answers, no instant solutions.

The need, as I see it, is for Governments - across Australia though more in its north east than elsewhere - to be sensitive to the needs of Aborigines, alert in meeting them and somewhat thick-skinned about the things that are said about them.

There is a wrong to be righted.

This exhibition and this book depict just how great a wrong it was - the sentimental white view of Aboriginal Australians is as offensive as the racist. There are plenty examples of both.

Geoff Dutton then has done us a signal favour. He and Macmillans have produced a beautiful book and one which bears a message we can't ignore. Festival exhibitions and performances are necessarily ephemeral. It's most fitting, therefore, that this should be one of its permanent memorials and that it should be the work of an eminent South Australian.