

This companion to the TV series is a comprehensive redress of misconception, says Thuy On.

## First Australians: An Illustrated History

Edited by Rachel Perkins and Marcia Langton

Melbourne University Press, \$89.99

THOSE who enjoyed the SBS TV series may like to have a look at this handsome hardback, the show's companion book. *First Australians* was conceived in part to counter the still pernicious belief in some quarters of "courageous white explorers in the colonies staking out the wilderness for God-fearing farmers amid the demise of the backward natives according to the laws of natural selection". It begins with the First Fleet and concludes with Eddie Mabo's challenge of Australia's "terra nullius" status.

The book's seven historians (black and white) methodically chart the interplay between settlers and natives through the eyes of notable indigenous individuals. Marcia Langton's opening chapter sets the scene, with the first amicable encounters gradually dissolving to mutual distrust before disintegrating into warfare.

James Boyce concentrates on Tasmanian Aborigines while **Bruce Pascoe** examines the sly strategies of colonial land acquisition. There's also comment on the stolen generations and institutionalisation.

Aside from the writing, which is lucid, compelling and restrained, the most appealing feature is the range of written records sourced and the abundance of illustrations and photographs. *First Australians* may not be the definitive account of indigenous history but its comprehensive research, essays, interviews and eyewitness stories go some way to redress some of the myths and misconceptions of two centuries of culture clash.

### CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

Thuy On, 'Taking on the cultural myths - HISTORY', *Age, The* (online), 31 Jan 2009 25 <<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.lib.uts.edu.au/apps/news/document-view?p=AUNB&docref=news/1260C751AE0EF460>>