



Minutes of Evidence Curriculum & TRP

BIOGRAPHIES

William Cooper (c.1861 to 1941)

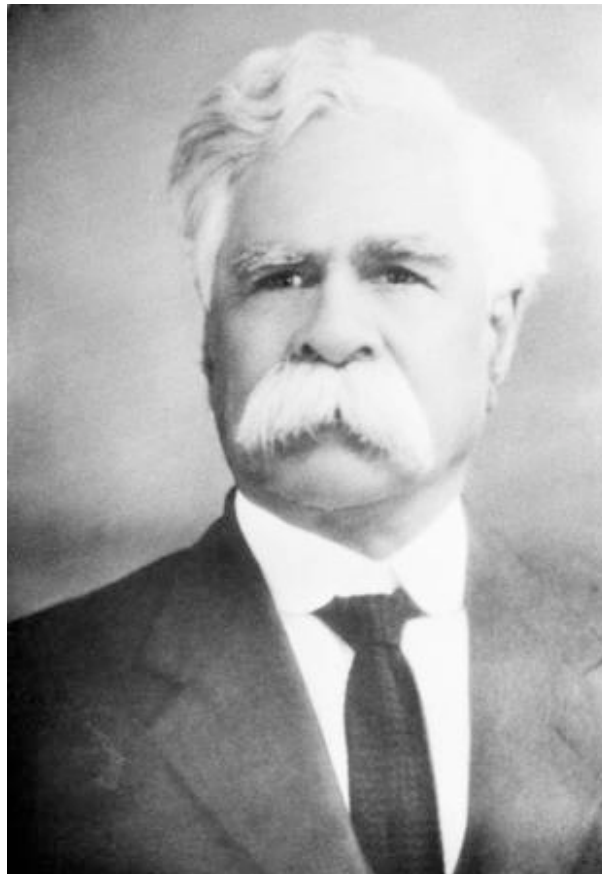


Figure 1 Source: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Born in 1860 or 1861, William Cooper was a Yorta Yorta man who grew up on his traditional lands at Maloga Aboriginal mission on the Murray River. For most of his adult life he worked as a "shearer, drover, horse-breaker and

general rural labourer”¹ In 1933, upon discovering that living on a reserve made him ineligible for an old age pension, Cooper moved to Footscray. He was 72 years old.

Cooper was an active campaigner for Indigenous rights. In 1935 he helped establish the Australian Aborigines League (AAL) and in 1938 was central to the organising of the ‘Day of Mourning’. He organized many petitions to agitate for change, including one to the King. Along with campaigning for Indigenous rights, he also championed the rights of other people. On December 6 1938 Cooper led a delegation of members from the AAL to the German consulate to deliver a petition, which protested “cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi government of Germany.”² Coopers life long work of fighting for Indigenous rights left a legacy, which inspired future Aboriginal Victorians to continue in his footsteps.

Listen to SBS radio ‘Remembering 1938 Day of Mourning declaration.’ (or read the transcript)

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2013/01/24/remembering-1938-day-mourning-declaration>

- What are some of the political actions that William Cooper undertook during his lifetime?
- What country is named as celebrating Cooper? Why?
- Do you think that Cooper would agree with Les Malezer’s idea of changing the date of Australia Day?
- Why do you think Les would want to change the day – in what ways is it similar to what Cooper was fighting for?

¹ Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *Thinking Black: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines’ League* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), p. 3.

² Dan Goldberg, “Aboriginal Leader Honored in Israel,” *JTA*, April 28, 2009, available from <http://www.jta.org/2009/04/28/news-opinion/world/aboriginal-leader-honored-in-israel>

Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) 1920 to 1993



Figure 2 https://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/1967_referendum/images/4C612x747.jpg

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (formerly known as Kath Walker) was born in Queensland on 3rd November 1920 and died 16th September 1993 aged 72. She is a descendant of the Noonuccal people of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island). In 1964 she became the first Aboriginal poet to have a book published, titled *We are Going*. Through her poetry, she gave voice to the plight of Aboriginal people and her work is seen as important in the struggle for Aboriginal rights and justice. She is well known not only as a poet and writer, but also as a political activist. Oodgeroo was elected Queensland State Secretary for the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) in 1962. In this position, she advocated and fought for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander equality and citizenship rights, illustrated by her tireless work on the campaign for the 1967 referendum.

In 1970 she was appointed as a Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil) for services to the community, but returned it in protest over the bicentenary celebrations held in 1988.

Further publications included *Dawn is at Hand* (1966), *My People* (1970), *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972) and her illustrated story book for children, *Father Sky and Mother Earth* (1981).

Watch Don Featherstone's short film, *Oodgeroo Noonuccal*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oF5PxEnkgil>

- What poem does she read?
- What are some of the key messages in it?
- What are some of the key themes she touches upon that relate to the broader narrative of Australian history?
- What prompted her to write the poem?

Charles Perkins (1936-2000)



Figure 3 <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2009/12/04/1259429478674.html>

Charles Perkins was an Arrernte man, who was born on 16 June 1936. In 1966 he became the first Aboriginal man to graduate from university, completing a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Sydney. Perkins led the 1965 Freedom Rides through regional New South Wales, challenging and exposing the rampant racism and segregation in the towns he visited. He spent most of his career working in Aboriginal affairs, both as part of government and the community. In 1987, he was awarded the Order of Australia, and in 1999, he was declared a National Treasure by the National Trust of Australia. He continued to fight for Indigenous rights and justice throughout his life. He died on 19 October 2000.

*For activities re: Perkins and the Freedom Rides, see p.29 on 'TOPIC 2 – MOVEMENTS FOR RIGHTS AND FREEDOM Background Notes'

Margaret Tucker (1904-1996)



Figure 4 <http://www.au.iofc.org/people>

Margaret Tucker grew up at Cummeragunja and at Moonaculla Inland Mission. Her father, William Clements, was Wiradjuri and her mother Teresa (Yarmuk) Clements, née Middleton, was Yulupna. She was forcibly removed at age 13 and was taken to Cootamundra Girls Training School where she was trained as a domestic servant. She was active in campaigning for Aboriginal rights alongside people such as William Cooper, Bill and Eric Onus, and Doug Nicholls. She was a founding member the Australian Aborigines League and was one of the Victorian representatives observing the Day of Mourning in 1938. She was active in the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) and the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League. She had one daughter, Molly Dyer, who went on to be a founder of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. She was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil) on 1 January 1968 for services to the Aboriginal community. Her biography, *If Everyone Cared* (1977), was one of the first publications detailing the experience of being a part of the Stolen Generations. The Margaret Tucker Hostel in Fairfield is named in her honour.

*For Margaret's account of being part of the Stolen Generations, see p.6 of TOPIC 1 – SEPARATION AND CONTINUITY Background Notes'