

## Book Reviews

*Citizens Without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship*  
By John Chesterman and Brian Galligan  
(Cambridge University Press, Melbourne 1997)

Jonathan Milner

The notion of reconciliation has in recent times been a recurring theme of mainstream political discourse. Some who have engaged in this debate have, with a degree of flippancy, suggested that an appreciation of the historical subjugation of the indigenous population is no more than a 'black armband' view of history. In tracing the history of Australian citizenship the authors of *Citizens Without Rights* entirely repudiate this notion. *Citizens Without Rights* is an unequivocal expression of the need to understand and appreciate a system that has been, in the sum of its parts if not at its core, fundamentally discriminatory. This awareness and understanding is critical if we are to have a mature appreciation of our nation which has been, at least partly, defined by such practices.

*Citizens Without Rights* focuses on the manner in which Aborigines were deprived of the basic rights of citizenship through government institutions and practices. It traces the institutional definition and development of Australian citizenship in the context of the Aboriginal community from colonial times, through Federation, and culminating in the tumult of contemporary debate. It combines insights using an interdisciplinary approach that draws in equal measure from the fields of political science, history, law and public policy. The authors trace this discriminatory treatment through an examination of constitutional provision, legislative definition, administrative practice and judicial determination.

*Citizens Without Rights* paints a disturbing portrait of the manner in which indigenous Australians were deprived of rights while being accorded the notional status of citizenship. In doing so, the authors expose a subtext that challenges the reader to consider the genuine substantive value of the Australian citizenship. *Citizens Without Rights* is a confronting, illuminating and ultimately rewarding book. At this particularly tumultuous juncture, the authors have made an important contribution to an understanding of our past history and of our present predicament. ●