Race Around Cairns:
Representations, perceptions and realities of race
in the Trinity Bay district 1876-1908

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Statement on the contribution of others

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Race Around Cairns: Representations, perceptions and realities of race in the Trinity Bay district, 1876-1908

Abstract

With the colonisation of the Trinity Bay district in the late nineteenth century, people arrived from many points of the compass. Not only Europeans, but also Pacific Islanders and East and South-east Asians imposed themselves on the numerous Aboriginal groups who inhabited Cairns and its vicinity. European Cairnsites perceived their world in strongly racialised terms, in which innate biological and cultural inequalities were assumed to exist between and among the diverse peoples of the area. They built a society based on racial hierarchy with themselves – white Australians – at the apex, the other races ranging down through varying degrees of inferiority. Despite the racial stratification and despite the significant – sometimes murderous – intercultural tensions, this was an interdependent colonial society characterised, to a large extent, by peaceable accommodations and productive inter-racial relationships. Europeans understood themselves to be out of place in the tropics, so when they imagined the district’s future they typically saw non-whites continuing to play an important part – a vision not shared by the Australian mainstream around the time of federation. This thesis scrutinises words and images from early Cairns, to recover the ways in which racial representations were used across a range of social and cultural contexts and how they were transformed over time. It shows that European Cairnsites constructed a local racial vernacular, in some ways discordant with the white Australia ideal, in other ways consistent with it, but always serving the interests of white dominance.
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List of Abbreviations

AIATSIS: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

AN: Aboriginal News

ANU: Australian National University

ANU:NB: Australian National University Noel Butlin Archive Centre

BC: Brisbane Courier

CA: Cairns Argus

CC: Cooktown Courier

CDT: Cairns Daily Times

CH: Cooktown Herald

CHPRA: Cooktown Herald and Palmer River Advertiser

CHS: Cairns Historical Society

CI: Cooktown Independent

CP: Cairns Post

CSR: Colonial Sugar Refining

HA: Herberton Advertiser

HRE: Herbert River Express

JOL: John Oxley Library

MC: Mackay Chronicle

MP: Morning Post

MS: Mackay Standard

NAA: National Archive of Australia.

NA: Northern Advocate

NEB: New Endeavour Beacon

NLA: National Library of Australia

NQH: North Queensland Herald

NQR: North Queensland Register
PDMR: Port Douglas and Mossman Record

QJCU: James Cook University, University Library Archives

QSA: Queensland State Archives

TSP: Torres Strait Pilot

TT: Trinity Times

UQFL: University of Queensland Fryer Library

WRT: Wild River Times
Maps: Cairns and its district

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