

THE GLORIFIED FLOWER

RACE, GENDER AND ASSIMILATION IN
AUSTRALIA, 1937-1977



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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This is a gendered history of the period which spans, what was known popularly, and in official government documents, as the era of Aboriginal 'assimilation', from the late 1930s until the early 1970s. This study considers the ways in which public representations of 'gender' interacted with the administration, and discourse, of 'race' in a historical period, when biological solutions to the Aboriginal 'problem' were replaced with a cultural model. The first part of this thesis, through a series of historical case studies based on the archives and official records of the Aborigines Protection Board (1909-1939) and the Aborigines Welfare Board (1940-1969) in New South Wales, focuses on how the policy of biological and cultural assimilation drew on ideas about femininity and sexuality to inform policy, administration, personnel, and imagery sponsored by the state during the assimilation era. The thesis shows how particular representations of femininity and masculinity were central to administrative attempts to biologically 'absorb', and later culturally, 'assimilate' Aboriginal women and their children into 'White' Australia.

The second part of the thesis explores the way that negative definitions of Aboriginal culture in New South Wales in the post-War period were influenced by ideas about Aboriginal women as the primary reproducers, and producers of that culture. This section argues that official attitudes and policies directed at Aboriginal women, influenced on-going attitudes towards Aboriginal culture and identity in the apparently 'enlightened' 1960s and 1970s when new Federal legislation promised an era of equality and 'self-determination' for Aboriginal people. Overall this thesis traces the disciplinary regimens operating in New South Wales from the late 1930s to early 1970s, and the gendered identities performed in relation to them. A central purpose of this work is to make race, gender and sexuality the basis for cultural and historical analysis, rather than 'adding on' women and race to the historical narrative.