

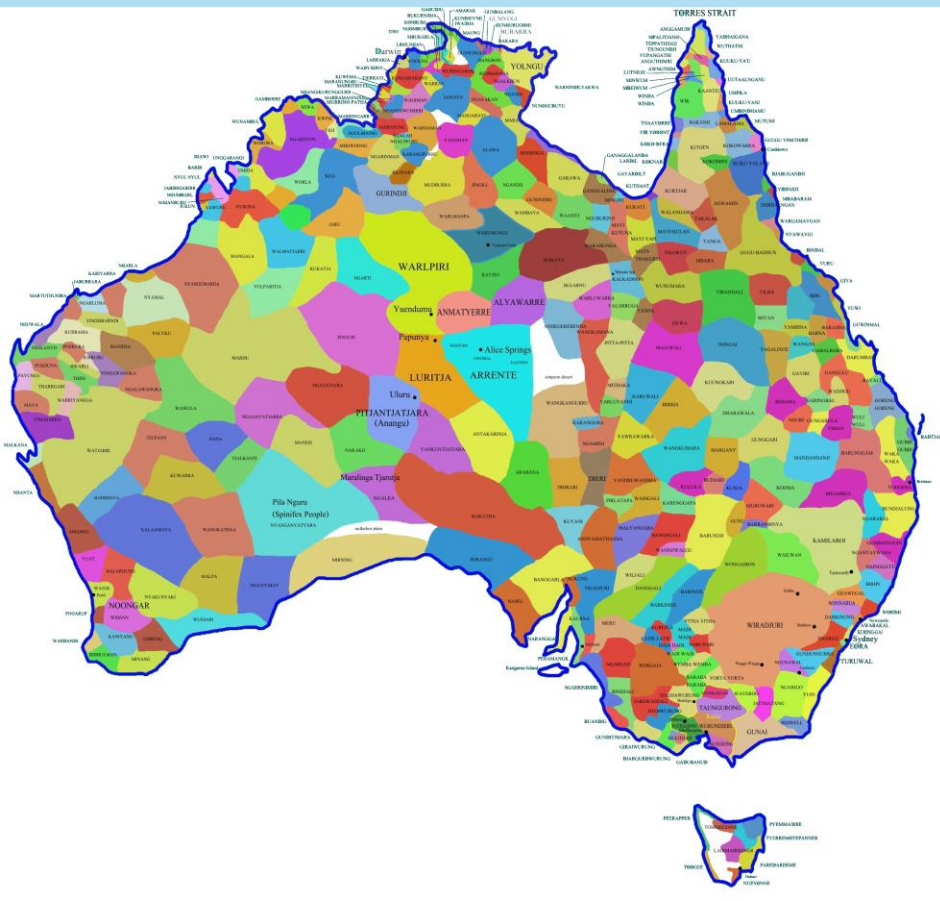


# **Australian Aboriginal Peoples**

**Presented by  
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# Australian Aboriginal Peoples

- Australia's Indigenous peoples are two distinct cultural groups made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. But there is great diversity within these two broadly described groups exemplified by the over 250 different language groups spread across the nation.



- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also have their own laws and customs to determine the membership of their group.
- Today, the term 'Indigenous Australian' is used to encompass both Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.
- However, these people object being referred to a 'Indigenous' as the term is considered too generic.





# Prehistory

- It is generally held that Australian Aboriginal peoples originally came from Asia via insular Southeast Asia (now Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, East Timor, Indonesia, and the Philippines) and have been in Australia for at least 45,000–50,000 years.
- However, based on research at some archaeological sites in the Northern Territory, some scientists have claimed that early humans arrived considerably sooner, perhaps as early as 65,000 to 80,000 years ago.



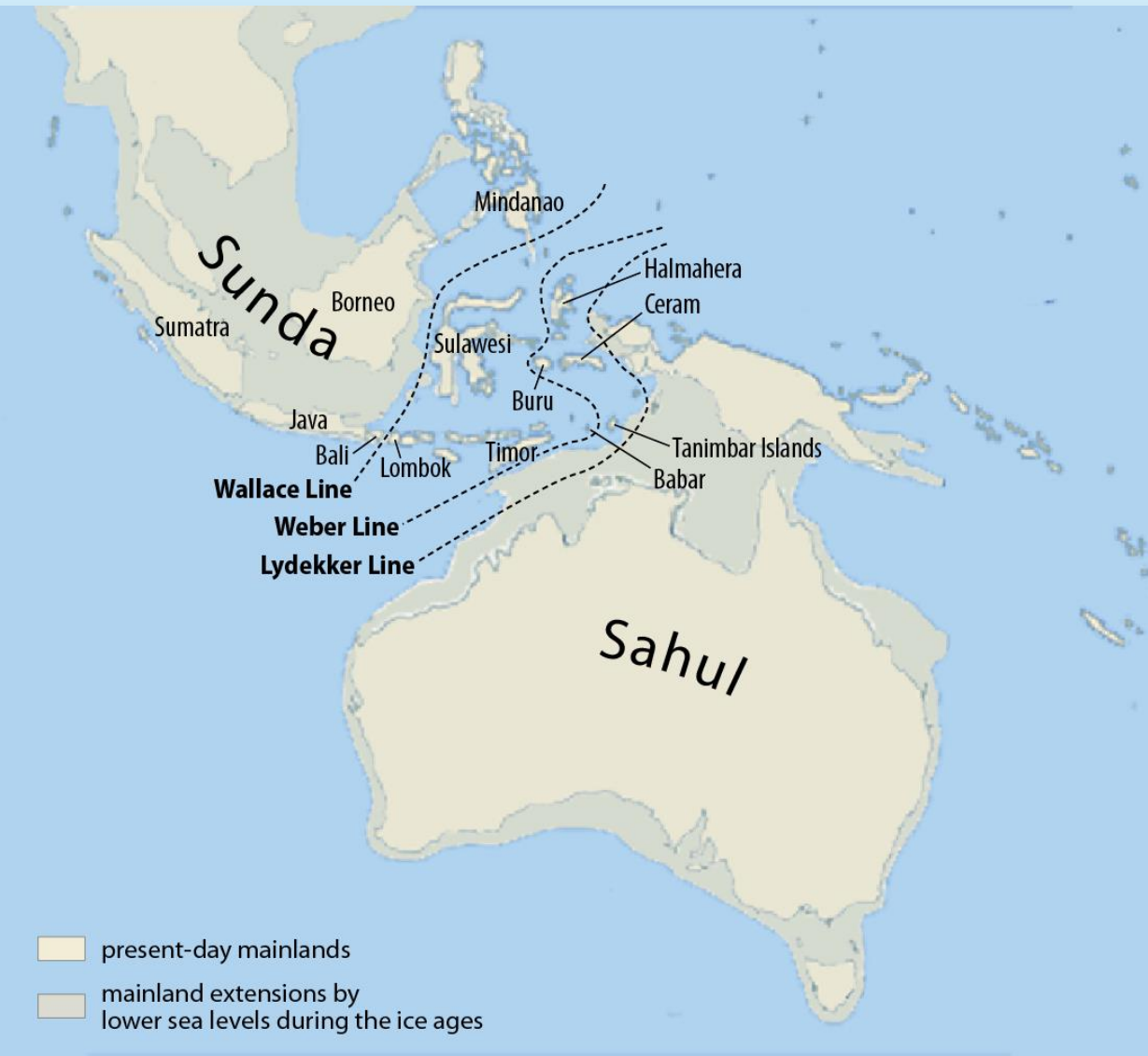
# Social Controversy

- According to traditional scholarship, Aboriginal people were hunter-gatherers who grew no crops and did not domesticate animals (apart from the dingo), so they were directly dependent on their natural environment.
- However, according to the book “Dark Emu” by Aboriginal author, Bruce Pascoe, he crafted a persuasive argument that Aboriginal people lived a life that also included some limited amount of farming.
- On the other hand, some archaeologists and historians argued that Aboriginal people employed agricultural practices that were far too sophisticated to be characterized as hunting and gathering.



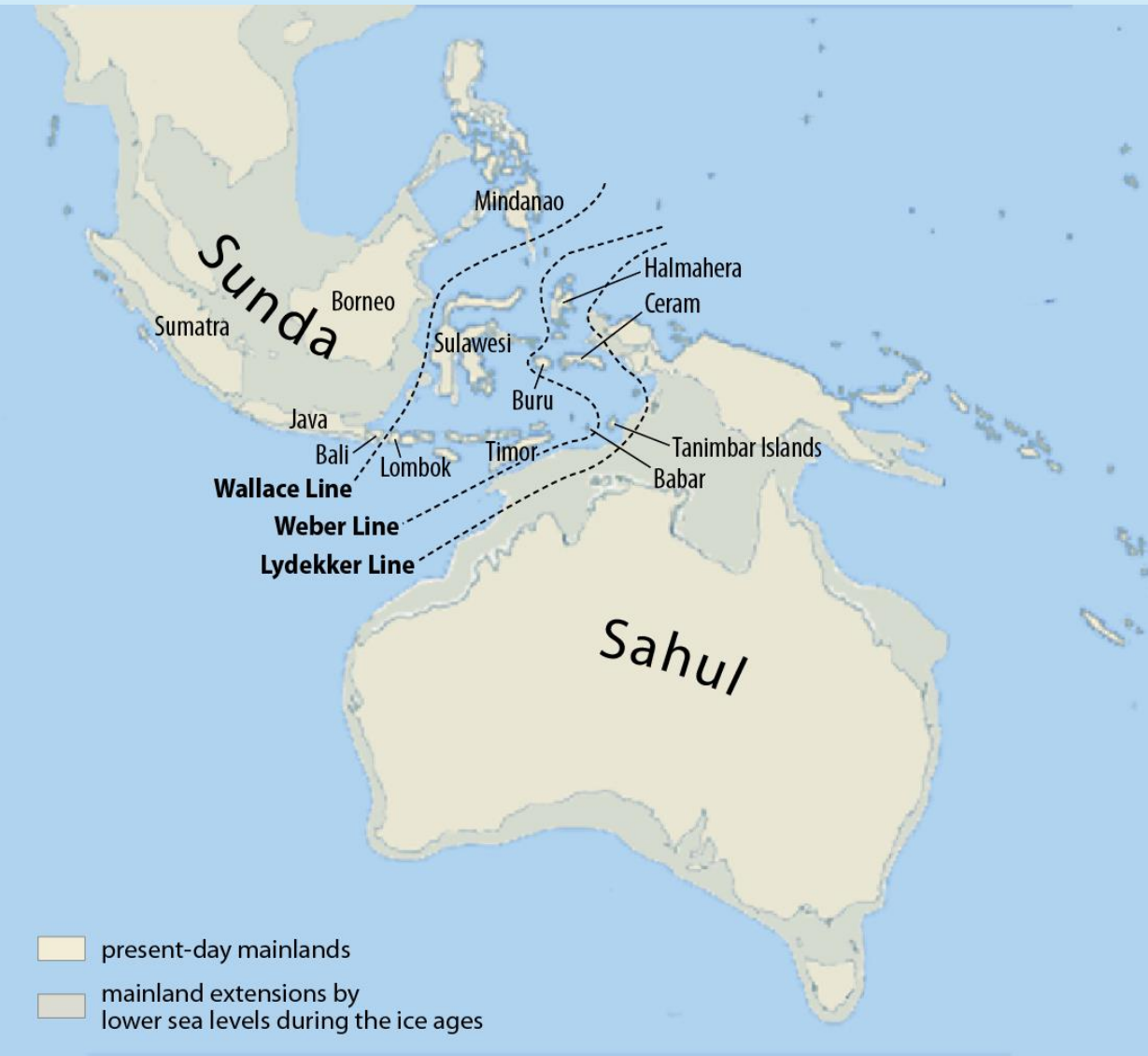


# Early Settlements



- The first settlements in Australia would have occurred during an era of lowered sea levels, when there were more-coextensive land bridges between Asia and Australia.
- Watercraft must have been used for some passages, however, such as those between Bali and Lombok and between Timor and Greater Australia, because they entail distances greater than 120 miles.

# Early Settlements



- This is the earliest confirmed seafaring in the world.
- By about 35,000 years ago all of the continent had been occupied, including the southwest and southeast corners (Tasmania became an island when sea levels rose sometime between 13,500 and 8,000 years ago, thus isolating Aboriginal people who lived there from the mainland) as well as the highlands of the island of New Guinea.
- Archaeological evidence suggests that occupation of the interior of Australia by Aboriginal peoples during the harsh climatic regime of the last glacial maximum (between 30,000 and 18,000 years ago) was highly dynamic, and all arid landscapes were permanently occupied only roughly 10,000 years ago.

# Australia's Wild Dog

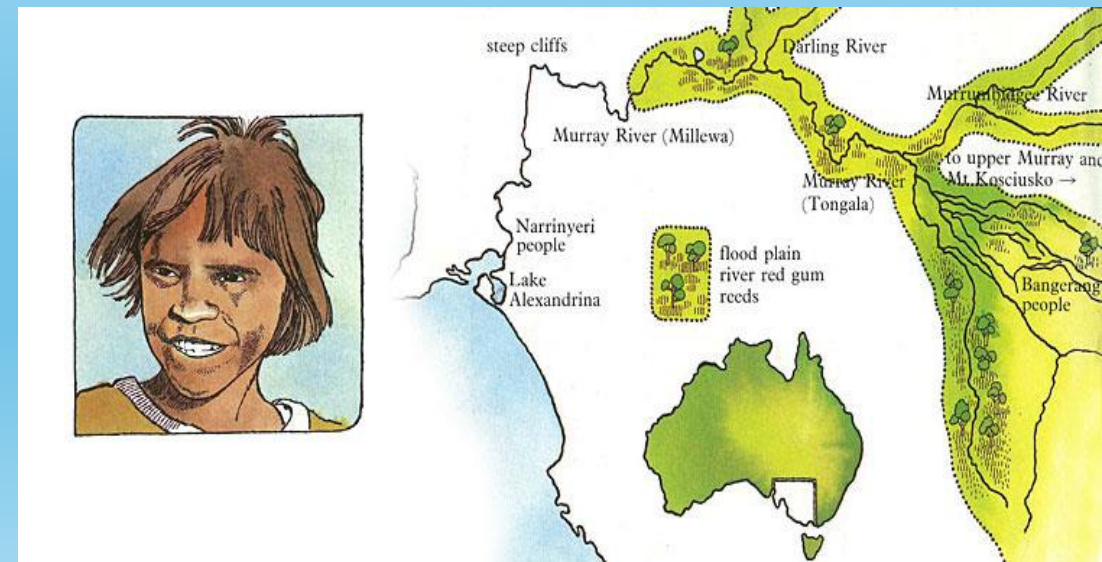
- The dingo, a type of wild dog, appeared in Australia only 5,000 to 3,000 years ago, which postdates the time that Aboriginal people began crafting small stone implements into composite tools some 8,000 years ago.
- Whereas the dingo was introduced from Southeast Asia, the small implements appear to be independent inventions from within Australia.
- Within the past 1,500–3,000 years, other significant changes occurred at the general continental level: population increases, the exploitation of new habitats, more efficient resource exploitation, and an increase in the exchange of valued items over wide areas.





# The Murry River Basin

- There is evidence for complex social behaviors such as cremation before 40,000 years ago, personal ornamentation (shell beads) by 30,000 years ago, and long-distance trade in objects before 10,000 years ago.
- Recent genetic evidence indicates multiple groups have migrated to Australia, from either a single migration or multiple waves of people.
- While there is no doubt that only anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) have ever occupied Australia, skulls found in the southeast suggest to some the existence of two distinct physical types.
- However, most now accept that there was a wide range of variation in pre-European populations. It has also been argued that one group on the Murray River practiced a form of cosmetic cranial deformation that led to their different appearance.





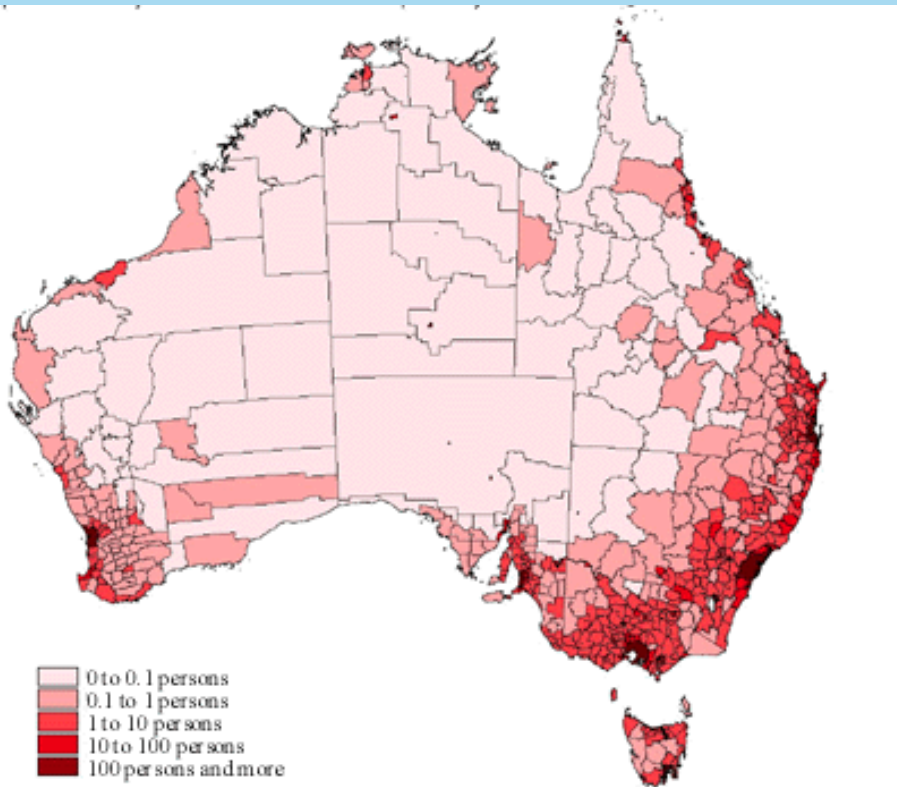
# Murray River Indigenous Timeline

## Years Ago

- 40 000 Aboriginals settle on Lake Mungo and gather perch, shellfish, lizards and emu eggs
- 30 000 Giant kangaroos and giant wombats rove the plains — megafauna
- 20 000 Last Ice Age — Snow on the nearby mountains
- 14 000 Climate becomes warmer — Some lakes dry out
- 10 000 People living at Kow Swamp who look different from the neighboring tribes
- 6 000 Lake Alexandrina formed as sea reaches today's level
- 4 000 People living on the lower Murray at Devon Downs
- 750 Many settlements along the river
- 200 The Murray supports more Aboriginals than most other places in Australia
- 170 White invasion begins — Squatters take over our river banks and plains — Many of Aboriginals die from influenza and smallpox
- 120 Many surviving Aboriginals forced to live on missions
- Today Aboriginals form communities and farms — Some live in the river towns.

# Traditional Sociocultural Patterns

- By the time of European settlement in 1788, Aboriginal peoples had occupied and utilized the entire continent and adapted successfully to a large range of ecological and climatic conditions, from wet temperate and tropical rainforests to extremely arid deserts.

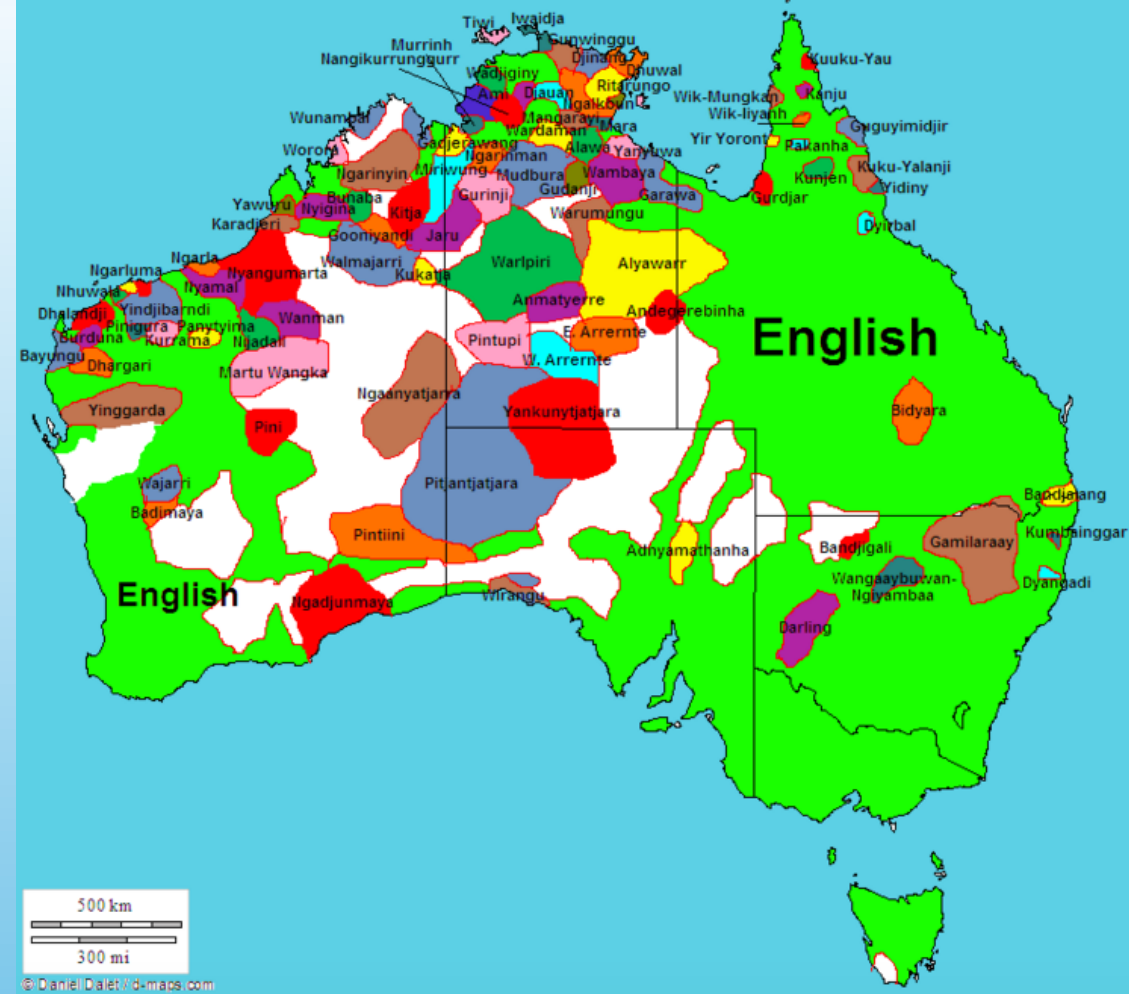


- Population densities ranged from 1 to 8 square miles per person in fertile riverine and coastal areas to more than 35 square miles per person in the vast interior deserts. Estimates of Aboriginal population vary from 300,000 to more than 1,000,000.



# Aboriginal Languages

- There are 200 different Aboriginal languages spoken (and hundreds of dialects) - most Aboriginal people are bilingual or multilingual.
- There may have been as many as 500 such aboriginal groups with members that shared cultural features and interacted more with one another than with members of different groups.
- These groups were not, however, political or economic entities, and, while language names may have been commonly used by groups as labels for one another, individual and group identity was grounded in much more locally oriented affiliations and memberships. The term "Aboriginal" was coined by white settlers in Australia in the 1830s, after they began to adopt the term "Australian" to define themselves.



# Corroboree

- Traditionally, a Corroboree is a gathering of Aboriginal people where they come together to share stories, songs, dances, and rituals that have been passed down through generations.
- This ceremony convey their history in stories and reenactments of the Dreaming, a mythological period of time that had a beginning but no foreseeable end and that during which the natural environment was shaped and humanized by the actions of mythic beings.



- The word Corroboree comes from the Dharug language of the Eora Nation, which means to dance.
- These gatherings are not just a form of entertainment but have deep spiritual significance to the Indigenous people of Australia.
- They serve as a way to connect with the land, their ancestors, and the Dreamtime – the period when the world was created by ancestral beings.



# The Dreaming

- The worldview of Aboriginal peoples centered on “the Dreaming,” or “dream-time,” a complex and comprehensive concept embodying the past, present, and future as well as virtually every aspect of life.
- It includes the creative era at the dawn of time, when mythic beings shaped the land and populated it with flora, fauna, and human beings and left behind the rules for social life.
- After their physical death and transformation into heavenly or earthly bodies, the indestructible creative beings withdrew from the earth into the spiritual realm.



# Religion



- As Aboriginal people understand it, the Dreaming beings retained control of all power and fertility, which they would release automatically into the human realm as long as humans followed their blueprint; this included the regular performance of rituals to ensure a continued flow of life-giving power.
- Spirit beings were messengers that communicated with the people to introduce new knowledge into human society.
- Through dreams and other states of altered consciousness, the living could come into contact with the spiritual realm and gain strength from it.



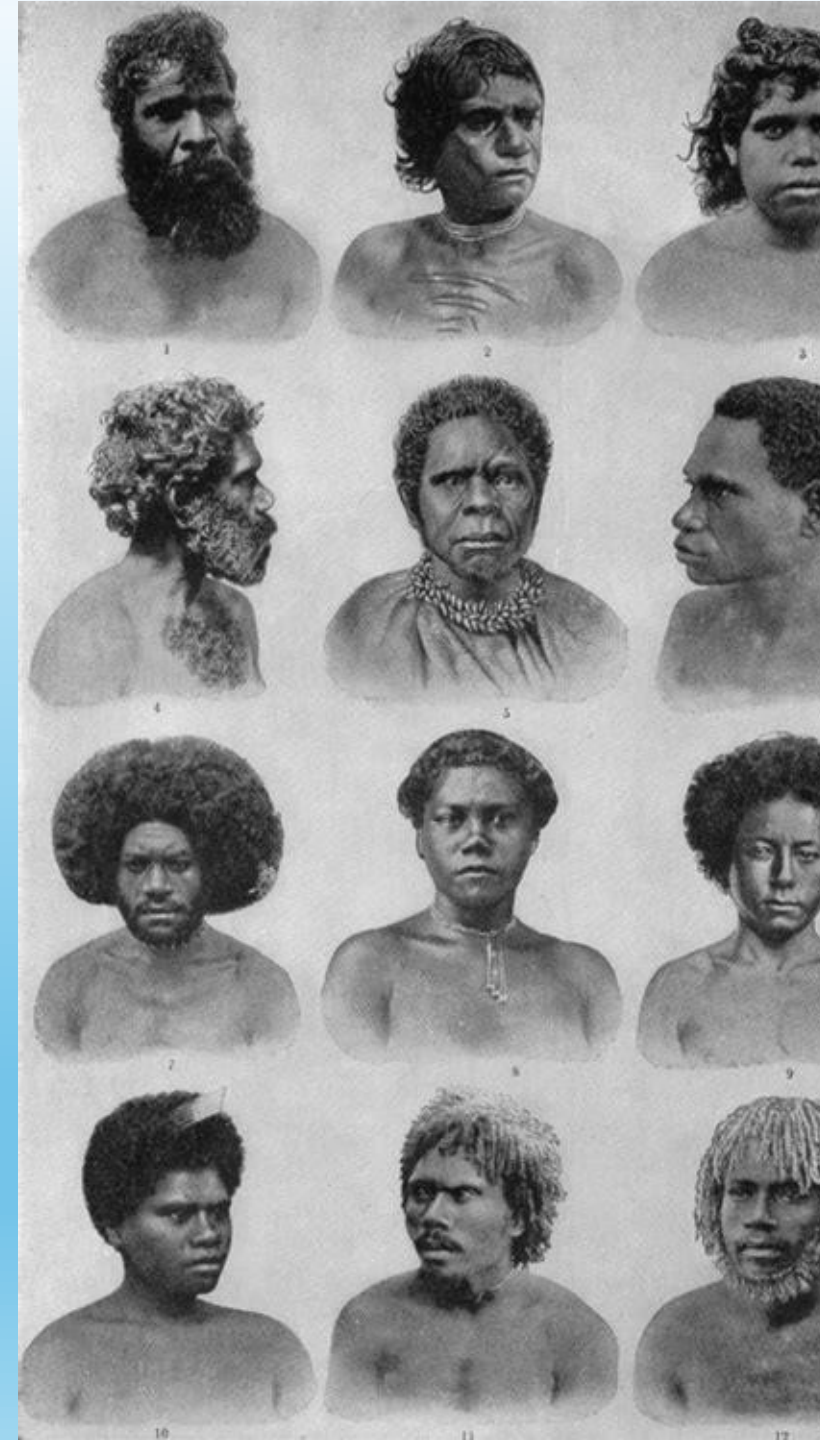
# Religion



- The stories enshrined in Aboriginal mythology variously "tell significant truths within each Aboriginal group's local landscape.
- They effectively layer the whole of the Australian continent's topography with cultural nuance and deeper meaning and empower selected audiences with the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of Australian Aboriginal ancestors back to time immemorial.

# Caste Culture

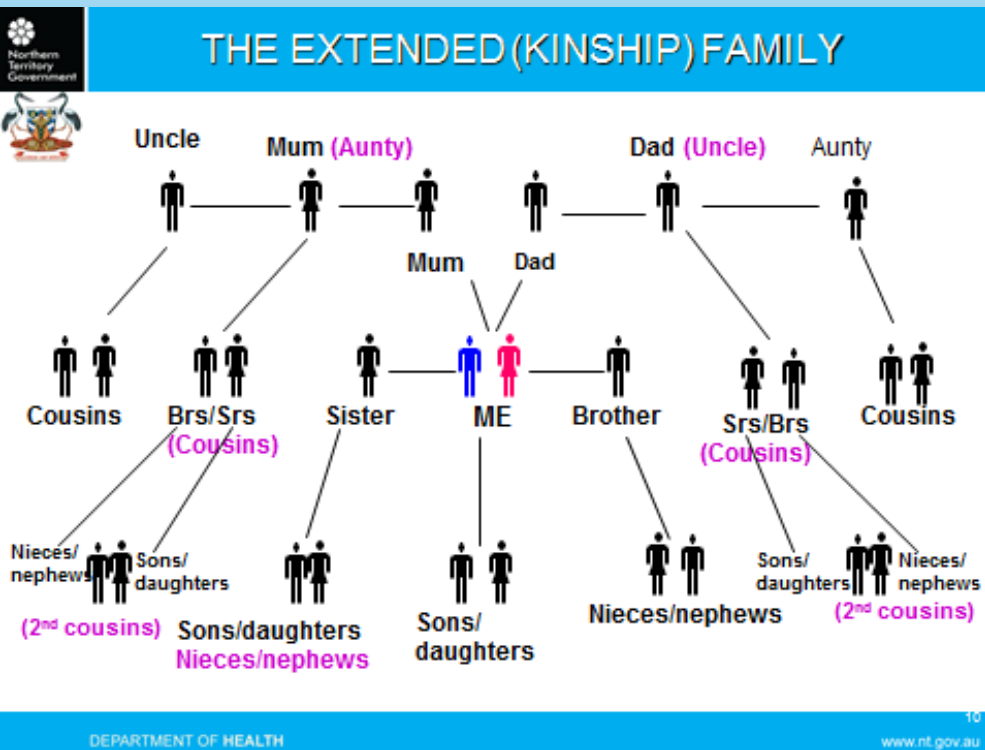
- In most of Australia Aboriginals were also members of various kinds of social categories, based on a division of eight subsections. Similar to the Caste System of India, people born into these “**Half-Castes**” could not change status. used in Australia during the colonial period to describe individuals of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry.
- At that time, it was commonly believed that the mixing of races was undesirable and would lead to the degeneration of the white race. The term half-caste was used to denote a person who was considered to be halfway between two races and therefore inferior to both.
- It is a controversial term with a complex history. These categories also indicated intermarrying divisions, were basic to the organization of many rituals, and served as a useful guide in determining distant kin from strangers.
- Also widespread were some 700 clans that is, groups whose members claimed descent from a common founding ancestor through either the male line (patriclan) or female line (matriclan).





# Kinship, Marriage, and Family

- The smooth operation of social life depended on obedience to religious precepts and on the operation of kinship, which was the major force regulating interpersonal behavior.
- Kinship is a system of social relationships expressed in a biological idiom through terms such as mother, son, and so on. Thus, terms for lineal relatives, such as father, also referred to collateral relatives, such as father's brothers.



- Likewise, mother's sisters were classed as mothers. Aboriginal people inhabited a universe of kin: everyone with whom one interacted in the normal course of life was not only classified and called by a kin term, but the behaviors between any two people were expected to conform to what was deemed appropriate between kin so related.

# Aboriginal Reciprocity

- Reciprocity, the behavior of giving help and advantages to each other in return, was a fundamental rule in Aboriginal kinship systems and in marriage.
- Marriage was not simply a relationship between two people. It linked two families or groups of kin, which, even before the union was consummated and most certainly afterward, had mutual obligations and responsibilities.
- Generally, throughout Aboriginal Australia those who received a wife had to make repayment either at the time of marriage or at some future time. In the simplest form of reciprocity, men exchanged sisters, and women brothers. Such exchanges took place between different clans, or families. Most kinship-and-marriage systems provided for the possible replacement of spouses and for parent surrogates.







# Arranged Marriages

- Infant betrothal was common. If arranged before the birth of one or both of the prospective spouses, it was a tentative arrangement subject to later ratification, mainly through continued gift giving to the girl's parents.
- In some Aboriginal societies parents of marriageable girls played one man against another, although this was always a potentially dangerous game, as there might be a considerable age discrepancy between the members of an arranged pair.
- Generally, a long-standing betrothal, cemented by gift giving and the rendering of services, had a good chance of surviving and fostering a genuine attachment between a couple.

# Arranged Marriages Cont.

- For a marriage to be recognized, it was usually enough that a couple should live together publicly and assume certain responsibilities in relation to each other and toward their respective families, but it might be considered binding only after a child was born.
- All people were expected to marry. A girl's marriage should be arranged before she reached puberty, and, ideally, a husband should be older than his wife, although in some cases a man would receive an older widow in marriage.
- Apart from formal betrothal, there were other ways of contracting marriages, such as elopement, capture during feuding or fighting, and redistribution of widows through the levirate (compulsory marriage of a widow to her deceased husband's brother). Elopement was often supported by love magic, which emphasized romantic love, as well as by the oblique or direct approval of extramarital relations.





# Transition to Adulthood

- For girls, the transition into adulthood, marriage, and full responsibility was a direct one. Even before puberty, having already become a knowledgeable and efficient food provider, a girl normally went to live with her husband and assumed the status of a married woman.
- For a boy, on the other hand, his carefree life changed drastically with the advent of initiation. His formal instruction into adulthood began, and he was prepared for his entry into religious ritual.
- A boy's future was henceforth in the hands of older men and ritual leaders who exercised authority in the community.
- A boy's age at the first rite varied: in the Great Sandy Desert it was about 16, in the Kimberley about 12, in northeastern Arnhem Land 6 to 8, and among the Aranda 10 to 12 or older. Generally, once he had reached puberty and facial hair had begun to show, he was ready for the initial marital rituals.



# Polygyny

- Although most men had only one wife at a time, polygyny was considered both legitimate and good. The average number of wives in polygynous unions was 2 or 3.
- The maximum of wives in the Great Sandy Desert was 5 or 6; among the Tiwi, 29; among the Yolngu, 20 to 25, with many men having 10 to 12 wives. In such circumstances, women had a scarcity value.



- Having more than one wife was usually a matter of personal inclination, but economic considerations were important; so were prestige and political advantage.
- Some women pressed their husbands to take an additional wife (or wives), since this meant more food coming into the family circle and more help with child care.



# More Unusual Marriage Rites

- To end a marriage, a woman might try elopement. A man could bestow an unsatisfactory wife on someone else or divorce her.
- A formal declaration or some symbolic gesture on his part might be all that was necessary. In broad terms, a husband had more rights over his wife than she had over him.
- Taking into account the overall relations between men and women and their separate and complementary arenas of activity in marriage and in other aspects of social living, women in Aboriginal societies were not markedly oppressed.



# Circumcision and Initiation

- Circumcision was one of the most important rites over the greater part of Australia. Other rites included piercing of the nasal septum, tooth pulling (in New South Wales this was central in initiation), and the blood rite, which involved bloodletting from an arm vein or a penis incisura—the blood being used for anointing or sipping (red ochre was used as a substitute for blood in some cases).



- Hair removal, scarring, and playing with fire were also widespread practices. Initiation in Aboriginal Australia was a symbolic reenactment of death in order to achieve new life as an adult.
- The initiation rites themselves were a focal point in discipline and training; they included songs and rituals having an educational purpose. All boys were initiated, and traditionally there were no exceptions.



# Coming of Age

- For girls, puberty was marked by either total or partial seclusion and by food taboos (also applied to male novices). Afterward they were decorated and ritually purified. Ritual defloration and hymen cutting were practiced in a few areas, but, in general, puberty among girls was not ritually celebrated.
- Boys, after circumcision, became increasingly involved in adult activities. Although they were not free to marry immediately, even if they had reached puberty. By delaying the age of marriage for young men, sometimes until they were in their late 20s, and keeping the age of first marriage for girls as low as 12 or 13, the practice of polygyny was made more workable.
- Adulthood brought increased status but added responsibilities. A vast store of information had to be handed down from one generation to the next. This process continued through life and was especially marked in men's religious activity.



# **Australian Aboriginal Peoples**

I hope you found these facts about the Māori People interesting and informative.

New Zealand Is amazing. I hope you get the opportunity to visit this beautiful and historic country for yourselves.

**Thank you for coming!**



# Acknowledgement

My seminars are the result of many years of travel experience combined with many hours of research over the internet.

I would like to acknowledge the many sources I have accessed.

These include: Wikipedia.com, Britannica.com, and the various Museum, Park and Government websites.