

Proposal for Script Development funds for project

"A Time To Dream II"

Bruce McGuinness
Director

Gary Foley/Haydn Keenan
Producers

Introduction

In 1963, the Gurindji people, led by Vincent Lingiari walked off Wave Hill Station in the Northern Territory and triggered a decade of intense political agitation and struggle for justice in the Aboriginal community nationally which culminated in the legendary Aboriginal Embassy in 1972. This was the most intense, dynamic and exciting period for the Aboriginal resistance, and a time when fantastic things happened in the Koori community nationally.

It was a time of great political, social and cultural upheaval, and saw the emergence of the beginnings of the great Aboriginal cultural renaissance that has engulfed Australia in the two decades since.

During that decade Koori writers like Kevin Gilbert, Kath Walker (Oojeroo Noonuckle), Jack Davis, Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo) first came to the fore, artists like Thancoupie, Yirrawala, Dick Roughsey, Lin Onus and others were beginning to gain recognition, and in the theatre Jack Charles and Bob Maza's seminal Nindethana Theatre in the late 1960's in turn inspired the National Black Theatre with Bindi Williams, Zac Martin, Bob Maza, Gary Foley and Aileen Corpus.

The N.B.T. production "Basically Black", which was performed at the old Nimrod Theatre in Sydney in 1972 was the first all-Aboriginal theatre production, and when ABC-TV filmed a television adaptation of the show in 1973, it became the first all-Aboriginal television show.

This cultural explosion not only coincided with the intense political activity in the Aboriginal community at the time, but it was also very much part of the political struggle, helping us to communicate our statement to the world, as well as a means of expressing, reinforcing and strengthening our Aboriginality.

In that historical context, and in the midst of the political struggle, the first 16mm film directed by a Koori person was made in Melbourne in 1972. It was a 20 minute B&W film called, "*Black Fire*", and was made by then Monash University student and Koori political activist, Bruce McGuinness. The budget for the film was \$400.

Six months later in 1973 McGuinness began shooting his second film with a crew that included Gary Foley as 2nd Cameraman. The crew shot extensive footage of the historic 1973 Aboriginal Arts Conference in Canberra which was attended by the most important Aboriginal traditional and contemporary artists, performers and political leaders of the day.

The film shot by McGuinness and his crew at that conference is probably some of the most important footage ever of the leadership of Black Australia at that time, especially since most of the people in the film are now deceased.

The film subsequently made by McGuinness was a 50 minute colour production called, "*A Time To Dream*", and is regarded by the few privileged enough to have attended one of its rare screenings as being one of the most important Koori films ever made. Unfortunately, the film has very rarely in the last 20 years ever been screened outside the Koori community, and even the National Film Archive does not have a copy.

The two films made by Mr McGuinness are still as powerful today as when they were first made over twenty years ago, and have enormous historical significance both as the first two films directed by an Aboriginal person, and also because of the rare, historical footage contained.

An interesting footnote is that today one of the top emerging Koori bands on the national scene is a Melbourne group called "*Black Fire*", whose recently released debut album is called "*A Time To Dream*". One of the band members is Bruce McGuinness' son Kelli, who is also seen in both films as a young child.

The Project

It is proposed that, utilising footage from "*Black Fire*" and "*A Time To Dream*" and archival footage from other films and TV news, to revisit the situations and people seen in the original films and examine what happened in the decade leading up to that famous 1973 Arts Conference. This will place the people portrayed in "Time to Dream" in their correct historical context as well as create a greater understanding and appreciation of the tremendous historical upheaval of the years leading up to the conference.

Through interviews with Koori community people we will also look at what happened since to the hope and optimism that had been expressed then.

At this stage we envisage a basic "reconstruction" of the original "*A Time To Dream*" incorporating it into an "Eyes on the Prize" style feature which would seek to extend the viewers understanding of the people and events in the Koori resistance movement's "great leap forward".

Utilising archival footage and interviews with surviving Koori participants, examine the major events and identities of the decade of political change leading up to the conference shown in "*A Time To Dream*". In doing so, we would seek to analyse how the modern-day Aboriginal movement evolved and developed throughout the 1960's -'70's, and reveal the so far untold story from the perspective of Koori people who were involved in these events.

We would hope that the final film would provide Australians (Koori and non-Koori) with the first major insight and perspective on a period of major change in Australian history.

Some of the events we would seek to examine in detail include :-

1: The Gurindji Begin Their Decade-long Battle - 1963

The Gurindji people, led by Vincent Lingiari, walk off Wave Hill Station - there exists extensive archival footage of these events, and we would supplement that with interviews of Gurindji people involved in that struggle to understand what it meant to them. Also we would interview Koori people in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane who met, and were inspired by, Vincent Lingiari and other Gurindji leaders in their forays south in the mid-1960's seeking political, moral and financial support.

2: The "Freedom Rides" Fan the Flames in NSW - 1963 -64

We intend to interview participants and other Koori's who remember the Charles Perkins-led "Freedom Rides" in northern NSW, and examine how they encouraged a generation of young NSW Kooris to take the first step toward radicalisation. Perkins in the mid 1960's was then involved in the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs in Sydney which was a major social centre/refuge for Kooris which evolved into a major political ideas breeding ground for the generation of radical young activists who burst forth in the late 1960's.

3: The Birth of "Black Power" 1967 - 72

The battle for Aboriginal control of Aboriginal organisations gave the white racist media of the day a chance to proclaim that "Black Power" had arrived in Australia. In reality it was a concerted push by Aboriginal activists to assert Aboriginal community control over organisations that were acting and speaking on their behalf. In 1966, the only national Aboriginal organisation in existence (FCAATSI - Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines & Torres Strait Islanders) was not controlled by

Koori and Islander people. The battles for Aboriginal control of FCAATSI and the Aborigines Advancement League in Victoria were long, bitter and a major turning point in Koori history. We will talk to the Koori & Islander people who participated in those battles to hear their view on what it all meant and why it was an important milestone in our history.

4: The 1967 Referendum

We will examine the 1967 Referendum, the struggle for the referendum and the campaign for the "Yes" vote. We will interview Indigenous people involved and find what it meant to them. In doing so we would be reminding Australians of the significance and meaning of the 1967 Referendum.

5: The Radicals Take Over - 1970 -72

The emergence of the "Community-controlled, Self-determination, Community-Survival Programs" from 1970 in Redfern marked the beginning of a new era. Here we will look at the development of the first Aboriginal Legal, Medical, Housing, and Children's Services in Redfern and Fitzroy in the early 1970's. These were the first genuine Koori community organisations in that they were conceived, designed, created, established and controlled from within the Koori community, by Koori people. The development of a network of these overtly political organisations in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide created an east-coast network of highly motivated, well organised and energetic Koori political activists. The scene was set for the ultimate showdown between the hostile Liberal/Country Party Government of the day and the strengthening Koori movement.

6: The Battle Begins - The Black Moratorium Demo's 1970 - 72

With the evolution of the east coast political network came an intensifying of the political struggle with a major series of Land Rights demonstrations in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Canberra. These series of rolling demo's were collectively known as the "Black Moratorium" demo's, in part as a challenge to the anti-Vietnam war demonstrators to look in their own back yard as well.

Also, in 1971 the South African Rugby Union team, the Springboks, toured Australia and Koori people in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane were involved in organising the demonstrations against them. This brought the new radical leadership of the Koori movement into direct contact with the white radical student and anti-racist movement leadership. Koori leaders forced Australian student leaders to face the fact that there was extensive racist oppression at home and it should be dealt with first. These alliances strengthened even further the Aboriginal movement.

It was also about this time that Denis Walker and Don Brady in Brisbane created your average white-Australians nightmare-come-true when they set up the **Black Panther Party of Australia**. We know that extensive archival footage exists covering most of the events mentioned in this period, and, combined with interviews of the surviving participants, we will be able to recreate the intensity and excitement of those times, as well as show people what really happened.

7: The Aboriginal Embassy 1972

By January 1972, the McMahon Government, under intense pressure from 18 months of intensifying Aboriginal Land Rights protests and demonstrations across Australia, made a fateful decision. That decision by McMahon to make a statement on Land Rights on 25th January (**Invasion Day**) was to directly lead to his governments final decline and fall in December 1972. His ill-fated statement in which he declared that his Govt would NEVER grant Land Rights, triggered the Aboriginal Embassy protest

on the lawns of Parliament in Canberra. The "Aboriginal Embassy" protest captured the imagination of the people of Australia and the world (it first made the world TV cameras aware of our struggle here) and because we had accidentally discovered a loop-hole in Canberra law, the authorities were unable to move us on.

Ultimately the McMahon governments extreme embarrassment over the "Embassy" led them into the more extraordinary blunder of changing the law in the middle of the night and sending the police at 9:05am the next morning to forcibly remove the tents.

TV pictures of the subsequent series of major, violent battles in Canberra between police and Aboriginal protesters were shown around the world, and Gough Whitlam (who was elected first Labor PM in 30 years six months later) has always said that the "Embassy" played a key role in the final demise of the McMahon Government.

Whitlam acknowledged his political debt to the Kooris when in his first act as PM he gave Vincent Lingiari and the Gurindji people their land and signified the final victory in their ten year struggle. Whitlam also then set about to dramatically improve the situation for Koori people. We will interview numerous Koori players in all of these events.

8: "A Time to Dream" 1973

About 4 months after the election of Whitlam, the historic 1973 Aboriginal Arts Seminar was held in Canberra. This conference is regarded as being the most important of that era, in that it brought together the political and cultural elite of black Australia together at a time when we were all fresh and enthused by the great victory of the "Embassy" demo's, and we were looking then optimistically at what we considered could only be a better future. Footage from "Time to Dream" will add a new dimension to many of the key people who have been seen in the film up to now in only intense political mode, as they are seen at the conference relaxing and speaking positively about the future.

CONCLUSION

At the end of our film, people will go away uplifted from a unique insight into a moving and heroic story of ordinary peoples struggle against adversity and winning, albeit historically momentarily. And we are certain that people, both Koori and non-Koori will be amazed at how little they know about the contemporary Koori political struggle despite the fact that it has gone on around them all their lives and continues to do so today.

WHAT WE SEEK

We are seeking at this stage for script-development funds to enable proper research to be done.