

# DISCUSSION

*Paper*

*12/98*

WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN?  
Cycles of Survival for Indigenous  
Australians

*Patrick Dodson*

THE 1998 HC (NUGGET) COOMBS NORTH AUSTRALIA LECTURE

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*Cycles of Survival for Indigenous Australians*

Patrick Dodson

North Australia Research Unit  
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# North Australia Research Unit The Australian National University

In 1995, the North Australia Research Unit's (NARU) position within the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPAS) was reviewed within the Institute of Advanced Studies. Following a report by the review committee, NARU underwent strategic restructuring in terms of management. For a short period NARU was relocated to the National Centre for Development Studies but, in August 1997, the Unit reverted to its former position and is directly accountable to the Director of RSPAS, The Australian National University.

The location of the Unit in Darwin has made it something of a frontier research post for more than two decades. Opened in the early 1970s, the aggregate of scholars over the years, and even today, is a reflection of the inter-disciplinary nature of the research carried out at the Unit.

A large portion of that research has focused on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia and, in that context, on the social, cultural, political, economic and development issues which are part of northern Australia. The range of research projects which are underway at any particular time depend very much on the priorities of the individuals who are engaged in the actual research. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues are of continuing importance in northern Australia and, consequently, to NARU. The reasons for this would be obvious to anyone who visits northern Australia—outside of Darwin, indigenous people comprise the majority of the population in the north.

In addition to NARU's traditional research there is now a very strong focus on governance and development in northern Australia, and in regions further north, particularly east Asia. Scholarly interest in this regional relationship has been substantial, adding considerably to the depth and breadth of NARU's cross-disciplinary role with the ANU.

As an integral part of the ANU, and RSPAS, the Unit offers scholars from Australia and around the world a unique opportunity to conduct research in one of the most remote academic outposts in Australia—perhaps, the world. NARU has excellent resources and site facilities, including a social science library which boasts a comprehensive collection of material on

northern Australia and which is networked into the ANU library system in Canberra. The library and other facilities are reserved for NARU academics, visiting fellows, and students and demand is relatively high during the 'Dry' season. Enquiries are welcome and should be directed to either the Unit Director or the Administrator.

## Guidelines for Contributors

Papers should not exceed ten thousand words. The Harvard system of referencing is recommended, and footnotes rather than endnotes are preferable. The styling method of this paper can be used as a guide. Authors are requested to send three copies of their paper and one copy on disk; please include an abstract and short profile of the author.

## Enquiries

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## WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN? Cycles of Survival for Indigenous Australians

**Patrick Dodson\***

I am not one to dwell on difference, I look for what unites us, not divides us.

And yet there are differences between the non-Aboriginal, the *Kardiya*<sup>1</sup>, and the Aboriginal, the indigenous, views of the worlds.

One of those is that we tend to see the world in circles while our non-Aboriginal brothers and sisters tend to see the world in straight lines.

Because I acknowledge that our history circles back on us and that the past is part of the present, not behind it, I acknowledge the history of the Larrakia people and thank them for allowing me to speak on their country. For letting me join their circle around their campfire, for sharing their history.

Even though the courts of the land have not agreed to their claims of an ongoing title to land that has been placed under freehold title, we know that they are the people of this place. The true owners of this country.

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\* Patrick Dodson was formerly Chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, former Director of both the Central Land Council and the Kimberley Land Council, and Commissioner on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

<sup>1</sup> *Kardiya* is an Aboriginal term that refers to non-Aboriginal Australians.

Because I know that the people of Darwin are linked in dreaming cycles with the people of Arnhem Land, I also respectfully acknowledge the Marika family of the Rirratingu clan in north east Arnhem Land. The Marika family adopted Nugget Coombs, recognising his elder status and respecting him. I thank them for allowing me to speak about one of their adopted countrymen. For letting me sing, or at least tell a story, of one of their big men.

Nugget was a small Nuggetty rock of a man with a heart like a giant tree. In the shade of his tree, I hope we can sit together and talk about his dream. To work and make it happen if we can.

### Three Circles

I want to talk about three circles today.

The first circle refers to the *Kardiya* circle:

This is the circle that was formed when European people brought their values, their behaviour, their attitudes, their culture – the circle that encloses us all in some form or another.

The second circle is the government circle:

From the days of the empire and colony through to nation, state and territory, the circle formed at the moment of colonisation of our sovereign lands. Laws, policies, programs make the shape of this circle.

The third circle is the blackfella circle:

This circle nourishes us. It refers to where we come from and live within – our lands, our seas and the traditions, cultures and laws that are part of the land – our people and our country.

These circles are distinct and separate in their essence. However, they overlap, push and pull on each other, so that change in one circle causes change to happen in another circle. They are often in tension, pushing for dominance, and against that, for survival.

Nugget knew that. He knew that the indigenous circle was being hooped in by the government circle. Put under pressure, he saw the laws and policies of governments being used to restrict and confine the Aboriginal law, the Aboriginal people.

Nugget, through his long life of public service, saw governments of all persuasions cycle through. He saw ministers and bureaucrats come and go, round and round like Canberra streets. All of these *Kardiya*, at sometime or other, acted to proscribe and determine the indigenous circle of survival. They all positioned themselves as the judge of what was best for indigenous people. They negotiated on our behalf, deciding how much the nation could afford in the recognition of our rights and entitlements. Balancing interests. Our own good was encircled by the supposed good of the nation. Whether that was for the common good or for the vested interest was never clear from the blackfella perspective.

Nugget saw the Aboriginal circle struggling to survive and acted on its spirit. Constrained in his public life he was unstoppable in his private life, during his so-called retirement. Everywhere he was met by the meaner spirit of the government circle; of those shrivelled souls who sought to dismiss his arguments, diminish his commitment. These were souls who were afraid to venture towards the outer reaches of their own circles in order to discover the riches of the other – those who stood to lose or felt threatened by the assertion of autonomy by the blackfella circle.

Even at Nugget's funeral these cycles were in tension. It still hurts to think of the day nearly a year ago we gathered at St Mary's Cathedral to farewell and praise him, and to sing his spirit to rest. It hurts because of the sense of loss felt by his family, by his friends, by his followers and his fellow Australians. Because of the loss of one who not only stood inside his own circles, but also came towards the Aboriginal circle and sought to advise the government circle on the importance of choice for those in the blackfella circle. He stood for how government might resource those choices while developing a sense of honour and integrity for themselves as well as according the indigenous peoples due respect as the first Australians.

But it also hurt that Nugget's life work, listening to the Aboriginal voice, was disregarded at his funeral. His first major book on indigenous issues was *Kulinma* – keep listening, as said in *Pitjantjatjara*.

At his funeral there were three official speakers. My speech was the only speech subject to scrutiny, to enforced edit, to muzzling by the highest office in the land: the Office of the Prime Minister. The government circle closed around my words. The Australian people were not allowed to listen.



At stake, I was told, was the presence of the Prime Minister at the State Service. His presence was, I knew, of profound importance to Nugget's family. For this reason I changed my words. The Prime Minister could then be seen to do his duty at a State Service.

So that the name of a great man was not diminished by the parsimonious and frightened actions of a lesser man I agreed to make the changes demanded by the Head of the government circle.

In essence, the Prime Minister disallowed comment about what Nugget would have thought about the leadership of this country at the time; about leadership without the courage to apologise; but with enough ticker to plan an election based on race – about leadership afraid of allowing Aboriginal people to enjoy their property rights, but brave enough to allow the state and territory governments along with the mining and pastoral industry to have their way. The Prime Minister did not want to hear us ask what Nugget would say about these things.

The Prime Minister's actions were hurtful and harmful. It hurt to feel the circle of government collide with the indigenous view of what was right, what was proper, what was true. Even though Nugget was not an indigenous person he had learned to listen, but the Prime Minister decided that the listening should stop.

The government circle was to be deaf to the voices of Aboriginal leaders from inside the blackfella circle. Paying their respects to someone who had gained eminence and authority in the three domains of government, *Kardiya* and blackfella circles.

The government had already decided, wrongly in fact, to deny the place of the indigenous leaders. They said that the indigenous leadership was tainted with Labor affiliations; that we were the beneficiaries of keeping our own people on welfare. The government did not understand that we talked for the rights of our people; that we sought to negotiate our future as indigenous people. In their hatred of Labor, they hated us, and sought to exterminate our role. Nugget's lessons were not learned.

## Learning from Nugget 1967

It is worthwhile stepping back in time to learn from Nugget's philosophy.

In November, 1967, over thirty years ago, Nugget was appointed by Prime Minister Holt as Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, a body attached to the Prime Minister's Department. There was no Aboriginal voice on the Council.

From the outset, Nugget noted that profound philosophical differences emerged. At the centre of the debate was the established doctrine of assimilation and the degree of commonwealth involvement in Aboriginal affairs.

The dominant view was that policies should be directed to incorporating Aborigines into white society to produce one homogeneous social structure, the assimilationist view. The government circle should force its presence and control over the Aboriginal circle, eliminating, controlling and absorbing it to produce one nation, one people.

Nugget would later write:

Although I was initially inclined to accept the prevailing assimilations approach, the Council took seriously its responsibility to listen to the views of Aborigines in all locations and circumstances and to act as a channel of expression for them.

The line was clearly drawn between the *Kardiya* circle and the blackfella circle in those days.

We were told that we could be equal if we changed – if we stopped being ourselves, left our country, forgot our laws, abandoned our social and cultural autonomy. We had to abandon our circle and be absorbed in the *Kardiya* circle. Most importantly, our culture was not to be worried about. It could be shed, like a snake sheds its skin. Left behind on the earth, until blown away by the winds.

Those days, we thought, were gone, gone for good.

The Australian people said in 1967 that the past was to be put behind us and we were to move on and progress as a society, as a nation.

## Today

And yet when we watch our political leaders today, listen as they cajole and persuade for our votes, we see the lines drawn again. We hear the old arguments, the same calls. Assimilation as a template for policy and practice is back in its virulent form from what we thought was the dead of the past.

In this phase of the argument, Aboriginal autonomy is considered, if at all, as theoretical. Mabo, the partial recognition of our rights to land in the common law seems to have threatened the sense of sovereignty held by the government circle. This has made it fearful of doing justice to the blackfella domain. It rekindled meanness in the *Kardiya* circles towards the level of assistance being provided by government to achieve a level of Aboriginal choice. For some in the *Kardiya* circle there is an impatience with not seeing outcomes for the public outlays to address manifest disadvantage. This concern of those in the *Kardiya* circle is appreciated but when its impatience forgets negotiation as a means to overhaul and redirect policies and strategies, those good intentions risk being corrupted by others in the government and *Kardiya* circle who demand conformity by the black circle and are blinded or are uncaring about its consequences.

The wheel turns and comes around again.

In the political climate of the present day, we have people seeking to join and control the government circle, who want to return to the past. They want to slide back to the sixties.

People like the One Nation Party and people like some members of the National Party, seek to prey on the fears of Australians who are misguided, confused and unsure. On the one hand they call for 'self empowerment', while on the other, they seek to extinguish Native Title.

The phrase 'extinguishment' is a legal one, but it has a fearful meaning. They seek to obliterate our rights and exterminate our culture. They seek to finish the bloody, dirty job.

'Beyond welfare', Senator Herron cries, as he sends in the army to provide the infrastructure other citizens enjoy as a right. This is supposed to provide the same health, housing, education and employment opportunities as others in the community, otherwise we and our children face a bleak future, continuing to rely on welfare handouts.

Herron has never understood what Nugget realised when he wrote that unilaterally imposed settlements would be 'divisive, destructive and ineffective'. Without negotiation, without recognition of choice, policies and programs are not going to work.

The *Kardiya* circle chimes in with a manufactured pretence at argument to back up the government circle with claims such as those made by Michael Warby for the Institute of Public Affairs (*The Age* 17 September 1998) who argued:

the welfare model of public policy – of indigenous advancement through income support and other welfare expenditure – has not worked. Indeed, welfare can be positively harmful. Huge spending on specific indigenous programs directs talents in indigenous communities to careers in qualifying for, and administering government funding. It weakens incentives to change behaviour in ways which might lose such funding.

The point that is missed by people like the Institute of Public Affairs and by Senator Herron is the point realised by Nugget Coombs decades ago, that it is a waste of money and resources to invest in programs that are imposed from outside and delivered without community involvement, ownership and choice. The army can lay pipes, but the people who stay behind are not given the tools and knowledge to keep the pipes and infrastructure going. Their community organisations are not involved. The people are not trained. Their social and cultural values are ignored in the process of laying pipes efficiently. There are no jobs, no futures. Only some pipes that will rust, rot, and be ruined.

Senator Herron puts his case:

the complete failure of Labor's approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs during its thirteen years in government is highlighted by the fact that despite the expenditure of 16 billion dollars, sixty percent of indigenous Australians remain dependant on welfare.

By denying negotiation, by ignoring empowerment, by ridiculing and attacking the probity and morality of Aboriginal leaders, the Herron push to move beyond welfare is a code for moving back to the past. This is a move to a past when Aboriginal people were contained on the missions and settlements, their leaders frustrated by having no voice, no organisation, no mandate to represent their people's interests. We want

basic services. We want health, housing and education. But not at the price of losing our own soul, our own identity, a say in our lives. We refuse to sacrifice the essence of what makes us Aboriginal people.

Australians of goodwill, the majority, cannot allow this to happen. They cannot cast a vote for a return to the policies of control, to the programs of denial, to the practices of exclusion, restriction and the determined extermination of Australia's indigenous heritage.

This is the real meaning of Herron's self empowerment.

This is what he means by removing Aborigines from the legacy of welfare.

## Aboriginal Organisations

The government circle seeks to weaken the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) while the One Nation pretenders to the government circle seek to destroy it. While pointing to ATSIC's weaknesses and failings, they blame the victim.

An Aboriginal organisation, constructed by governments, is to receive the blame for not being able to turn around decades of government neglect and policy confusion.

ATSIC, in this rhetoric, stands as a proxy for all Aboriginal people. It is the victims fault that they are a victim.

They seek to destroy Aboriginal organisations. Calling them blood sucking monsters, attempting to cut them out of a role in shaping the future of their communities, of representing their interests and giving them a strong voice, that when they stand alone, they cannot have. The organisations, such as the land councils, have helped communities all over the north move beyond welfare by bargaining and negotiating with powerful economic interests for a slice of the economic action. That role is now denied. Maybe they have been too effective in their advocacy of matters pertinent to the blackfella circle in their dealings with the government circle that they now have to be silenced and eliminated.

Issues of Native Title have been muted in the current campaign — Mabo, Wik, reconciliation, the words are rarely said. But again, the circle comes around.

Nugget Coombs, when he reviewed the decade of progress from 1967 to 1977, made some pertinent comments. In 1967, the Australian electorate voted with astonishing unanimity to confer on the Commonwealth Parliament the powers to legislate in respect of Aborigines with effect throughout Australia.

In 1977, Nugget wrote:

there is little in the history of the decade since the referendum about which white Australians can feel complacent, but the way ahead is clearer and the ferment of ideas necessary to open that way has begun.

Above all, Aborigines are developing the sense of a common identity, the institutions of political action and the intellectual and spiritual leadership which will give increasing authority to their claim to move along this way by their own efforts and at their own pace. Hope for the future lies essentially in their growing capacity to maintain these trends.

I would comment that this capacity, this leadership, this authority has been under siege in the last term of the Commonwealth Parliament. No longer do governments feel a need to negotiate, to cooperatively find solutions. Instead, the Ministers, the Prime Minister, the Members of Parliament, the Senators have closed their doors. They have either attacked or ignored Aboriginal leaders.

The government has introduced legislation that impacts on our rights to land and heritage without seeking our views or consent. They seek to give away commonwealth powers in these areas to the states and territories.

They have closed their ears, refusing to hear, refusing to listen. They want the government circle of the past to become the circle of the present.

Nugget also had words about the first circle: the world of values and attitudes held by non-Aboriginal Australia. He said the Aboriginal capacity to work towards a hopeful future:

would of course be more effective if it were matched by an increasing desire and determination among white Australians generally to welcome and support Aboriginal initiatives. I wish the evidence justified more optimistic expectations about such changes in white attitudes.

What goes around comes around.

The attitudes in the non-Aboriginal community that Nugget was pessimistic about then, are the attitudes that are expressed today in opinion polls, that drive policy to its lowest common denominator. Two decades after Nugget's review those attitudes are still there and are being exploited by the Howard Government.

This government, under this Prime Minister, has been courting this set of values, not changing it. They have not been leading, but following. Mr Howard has, until very recently, given space to the Hansons, to the One Nation pack, allowing these values to grow, until its growth, as in Queensland, threatened the power of his Party and that of his coalition partners. Howard, Hanson and Herron are birds of a feather, admittedly flying in separate parts of the sky, but coming to roost at night on the same tree.

But Howard, Hanson and Herron do not represent the views of all Australians. There are just as many, even more Australians who look back on the past as a guide to the future. They wear no black arm-bands but they also do not have a white blindfold. They feel love for this country and hold hope for its future.

They do not want the circle of the non-Aboriginal world, the circle of government, the circle of the Aboriginal world to be exclusive, separate domains. They do not want the Australian circle to be built up on exclusion and separation.

Nor do they want the government circle to absorb and control the Aboriginal circle. They see a nation that gives space and room to the need for Aboriginal people to shape their own contribution, to determine their own place in an ever changing world.

They are Australians for reconciliation. They seek a return to the bipartisan approach to commonwealth leadership in Aboriginal affairs that Nugget worked to achieve. That achievement was voiced by the Australian people in 1967.

When Gough Whitlam, here in Darwin, gave the Vincent Lingiari Lecture in August 1997, he reminded us of words said in our national Parliament.

He asked whether we have forgotten what Paul Hasluck said on 28 March 1950, in the first thorough speech on Aborigines in the national Parliament:

when we enter into international discussions, and raise our voice, as we should raise it, in defence of human rights and the protection of human welfare, our very words are mocked by the thousands of degraded and depressed people who crouch on the rubbish heap throughout the whole of this continent.

He asked whether we have forgotten what Kim Beazley Senior said on 14 May 1964:

Irrespective of who has control over Aborigines only one government is answerable before the forum of international opinion – the government of the Commonwealth of Australia. In the forum of international opinion – the United Nations – no one will raise Western Australia's policy or Queensland's policy but the delegates of the government of the Commonwealth of Australia will have to answer for Australia's attitude.

Regardless of the outcome of the election, all Australians of decency and goodwill would see the value, on the eve of the world visit to our shores for the Olympics, in an unambiguous assertion of a bipartisan cross-party return to those values.

This is one circle that should remain unbroken.

## Inside the Blackfella Circle

Nugget battled constantly to get acceptance for the need to get the government circle to listen. Will the government, or the *Kardiya* circles, ever listen and hear our plea?

As Galarrwuy Yunupingu puts things in his Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture this year:

I want you to understand the long, long history behind the issues which are facing us today... I want you to realise how hard we have struggled to have our Yolngu law recognised; how we have been burnt by your laws; why we are suspicious of your laws; and why there is conflict. But I also want to take you on a journey which I hope will show us a better way.

The blackfella circle has continuously appealed to the government and *Kardiya* circles to listen and understand our plea for some space, some respect, some room to be ourselves in our own country.



If they could learn to listen then the capacity of those within the blackfella circle to live with dignity, pride and security over their lives and their societies might be achievable.

This seems a dangerous dream for the government circle. Those in the blackfella circle would then be a people again. A people whose rights will have to be acknowledged and recognised, we would no longer be judged deficient by the rules of the government and *Kardiya* circles. Nor will we be their victims to play with.

Too often all that Australians know of the blackfella circle are the statistics of over representation on negative social indicators. They see high levels of public outlays which appear not to be reaching targets in health, housing, education, employment or economic development. Australians rarely hear of the life and aspirations of the people. Aboriginal people are denied their humanity in the face of statistics.

But it is the lives of people that are at issue, and it is their lives that need to be understood if we are going to turn the corner.

What savings in public expenditure would there be if the Prime Minister was big enough to make a genuine apology and provide restitution for the practices and policies that took Aboriginal kids away from their families, communities and lands? We would save money on prisons, on alcohol rehabilitation programs, on drug treatments, on the price of family breakdown and neglect.

A genuine apology would be indicative of a transformation in how indigenous affairs are to be handled in this nation.

The calls for justice within the government circles for Native Title recognition and honour based upon negotiations and agreements have been met with rejection. In Galarrawuy's words again:

That's what Brian Harradine and the Howard Government have left us with – a gutless Native Title. A fish that can't swim. If these people cant see that the parts that make the fish live and breathe are missing, our beautiful Native Title fish have been cut and gutted by Howard and Harradine.

It is not that the government circle cannot hear, it is just too busy thumping the table and yelling about what is best for us. This is a fact, a reality that the blackfella circle has to take on board.

The blackfella circle has to learn some fundamental principles to ensure its survival beyond the next few decades. It has to:

- (i) restore its faith in its own social and cultural values and not see the forward path as just opportunities to make individual success in the *Kardiya* circle;
- (ii) refocus upon its principles of unity within diversity where roles and functions are squarely integrated with responsibility and duty to one's people, country and traditions, but also whose protocols allow for the warmth of welcoming countrymen from outside their immediate circle;
- (iii) work with the government circle to address health, housing, employment, education and economic development, but recognise that the government circle pushes towards total assimilation and absorption, leaving only our art and culture to illustrate the Australian sense of place;
- (iv) understand that the Aboriginal law for country and people has every right to exist in its own form and cannot be determined or expressed by the institutions of the government circle. It is the sole domain of the blackfella circle and it cannot be given away;
- (v) resist despair in the face of continual oppressive domination by the government circle and sections of the *Kardiya* circle;
- (vi) realise that the Constitution, the law for government and *Kardiya* circles will only grudgingly recognise, respect and accept the rights within the blackfella circle.

### Inside the Whitefella Circle

Nugget saw twenty years ago, in 1978, that Aboriginal rights to land, granted in the Northern Territory, had a transitory air. He saw that:

the present backlash will whittle them away, returning Aboriginal people to their former dependent and powerless condition.

It is up to the *Kardiya* to stand up for a better Australia, a fairer Australia, where the so called backlash is resisted, where racism is opposed, where ignorance is replaced with knowledge and understanding. For Aboriginal people to succeed and survive, to make meaningful choices, there needs to

be a partnership with their fellow Australians based upon a true negotiation and a mutual respect.

A fair, just and tolerant society has to have governments that are prepared to listen to its people. Such governments have to provide the living circumstances where we have our own sense of autonomy and are able to nurture our families and people. This is highly dependent on what our brothers and sisters in the non-Aboriginal society and culture decide. It is their vote, their voice, their views that will shape our future.

A fair and just society for Australia has to rid itself of the policies of assimilation. The time has come to agree the principles of survival for the Aboriginal values of autonomy and how we might sustain our societies. If we do not achieve a reconciliation about these matters then I fear what is left of our societies and its traditional values and ways will truly be extinguished. We as Australians cannot look back at some future date and lament this. We must today make the move towards a healed and reconciled nation. Tomorrow, the question will be academic.

Finally, we need to find the courage, all of us, Aboriginal, *Kardiya* and government to create a fourth circle, where Australians of goodwill, of compassion, of integrity can work together to make into a reality the dreams of Nugget Coombs for a reconciled Australia. Where the differences are settled and accommodations made that recognise the uniqueness of a national consensus forged between the three circles. Nugget wanted a treaty – Senator Herron's policy statement offered a 'written understanding'. It is bridging that gap that will make the fourth circle come to life and provide justice and pride for all Australians.

## *Dr HC (Nugget) Coombs*

*1906 -1997*



*Illustration by Geoff Pryor, 'The Canberra Times'*

Dr HC (Nugget) Coombs was a distinguished Australian. For over half a century he challenged governments and bureaucracies in the shaping of economic and social policy and dedicated a lifetime to achieving social justice for Aboriginal people.

Dr Coombs was adviser to seven Prime Ministers, from Ben Chifley to Gough Whitlam, and after the 1967 referendum he became an activist and a fierce advocate for the rights of Aboriginal people to land, ownership of natural resources, autonomy and self-determination.

In retirement, Dr Coombs lived and worked for half of each year at the North Australia Research Unit in Darwin, remaining active as a Visiting Fellow of the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies at the Australian National University. His time was devoted to writing, liaising with friends, research associates and students. He produced a continuous flow of papers and publications on a wide range of issues affecting Aboriginal people.

In his honour, NARU established the Nugget Coombs Scholarships to create two Indigenous field scholarships each year. The scholarships are supported by public donations to the Forum and also by matching funds from the ANU's Endowment for Excellence. For further information about these scholarships, contact the North Australia Research Unit.

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