

Charles Perkins, letter to the editor, *The Australian*, 8 April 1968

I would like to enlighten E. J. Smith, who asked in a letter to *The Australian* on March 27 why part-Aboriginal people such as myself identify as Aboriginals.

Firstly we were usually born on Mission Stations, Government Reserves or shanty towns. We received aid only as far as it was convenient for the white people. We were therefore identifiable to ourselves as well as white people as "the Aboriginals".

Secondly we were related by kinship, blood and cultural ties to our full-blood parents or grandparents. This tie can never be broken merely because the degree of "blood" may vary, or if white authority or individuals wish it so. An example of this is the Northern Territory where before 1956 an Aboriginal was any person with one drop of Aboriginal blood in his veins—the definition was reversed by law only some ten years ago. Very convenient for the lawmakers, but imagine its affect on the Aboriginal family. Aboriginals are not like white people. They love their children, whatever shade. Generally, in the past, the white people never really wanted us. When they did it was usually on their terms for sexual, economic or paternal reasons.

Thirdly many thousands of our people were forced to carry passes— much like passports— if ever we wished to mix in the white community. This carried our photograph, plus character references. We were labelled as fit and proper Aboriginals to associate with white people. I was one of the few Aboriginals in Adelaide who refused to carry a pass or "dog ticket" as we called it. All my life, before I graduated from the University of Sydney, I was categorised by law and socially as an Aboriginal. Now that I have graduated I am suddenly transformed by people such as Smith, into a non-Aboriginal.

This conveniently puts me into a situation where I must, according to official assimilation policy, forget my people, my background, my former obligations. I am now "white." I therefore am not supposed to voice an opinion on the scandalous situation Aboriginal people are in nor am I entitled to speak any longer as a "legal Aboriginal." All this because I have received my degree and am in a position to voice an opinion. Or could it be that I, and others like me, could influence the unacceptable social-racial status quo in Australia?

Fourthly there can be no real comparison between a nationality and race. A nationality is a mere political or geographic distinction between people. Race on the other hand goes much further into the biological (color) and cultural (kinship, customs, attitudes) field.

The Aboriginal people in Australia today—full-blood and part blood— do not want the sympathy of white people with an attitude such as Smith's. We have had enough of this in the past.

What we want is good education, respect, pride in our ancestry, more job opportunities and understanding.

It seems people such as Smith carry a guilt complex of past mistreatment, and would want to now stop the truth from being revealed, and hence control Aboriginal advancement.

If Australians would delve into our social history in a truthful manner they would be horrified at the result of the investigation.

The story is not a nice one and Aboriginals have suffered as a consequence.

All our lives Aboriginals have lived in a secondary position to the white Australian.

I no longer wish for this situation. Therefore I, and approximately 250,000 others like me, claim our ancestry. We are Aboriginal Australians— proud of our country and our race.