

Powerful voices that provide solutions

By Ray Jackson



Ray Jackson

Some books just have that *need* to be read both nationally and internationally. *Talking Back: Voices of Color*, published by Red Letter Press, is most definitely is one of these.

The eight broad themes tackle issues with a sometimes historical, sometimes personal, perspective as seen through the lived experiences of people of colour.

There is something for every reader in this collection of essays, which gives these powerful voices of colour a platform to talk back. Whilst the focus of the collection is the U.S., the social struggles are universal. Racism is a worldwide disease, and it is powered by the politics of whiteness. Education of an equal standard for all is still being fought for as capitalist economies privatise education for the benefit of those deemed worthy.

The book exposes how those seeking to immigrate to richer countries—fleeing wars, terrorism and natural disasters—are faced with tougher and less humane responses. The right of women to equality in all aspects of life and work is a struggle in flux. All these issues are put to the reader, not only to explain the source the problem, but also to excite action through uniting with others.

I have been involved in “crimes of punishment” issues in Australia since 1987. This section of *Talking Back* highlights the many similarities. Australia’s police, courts and gaols emulate the stories in the book. Our thuggish police are extremely racist against people of colour and practice vigorously their racist acts of “profiling” and harassment. Our cops also kill with impunity, immune from being brought to justice.

The article by Emily Woo Yamasaki, “Escalating police violence renews demand for elected civilian boards” struck a chord. It opens: “Police brutality is on the rise and out of control. Cop violence against people of color, immigrants and the poor is the status quo. Racial profiling — identifying people as criminal suspects based on their skin tone—is a daily reality. Forceful repression is the rule at demonstrations addressing grievances from the economic scorched-earth policies of the World Trade Organization to the frame-up of African-American political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.”

I used similar words at our rally to stop the removal of Aborigines and social housing tenants from the increasingly affluent suburbs of Redfern and Waterloo. Police violence is endemic the world over, due to capitalism being in great danger and stress. As an Aboriginal group, we are heavily policed when we are “allowed” to march as they continue their bullying attempts to silence us.

Here in Australia we too call for citizen review boards in an attempt to bring the thuggish power of police to an end. For nearly 30 years we have demanded an end to their power to investigate themselves.

Since 1 January 1980, there have been over 450 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody. Police murder our people with malice aforethought and without any duty of care. Similar to the deplorable situation in the U.S., our police also walk free from the most heinous crimes perpetrated against people of colour, immigrants, the poor and the homeless. In other articles, I was shocked to learn that in one police killing, 42 bullets were fired into the victim's body. I was angered to read that there is a police killing of an African-American man, woman or child every 36 hours!

I was appalled to be reminded of the large number of political prisoners in the U.S. and was stunned that the truth revealed by the proper legal process in courts of law mean nothing, and prisoners like Mumia, Leonard Peltier and others will, seemingly, die as innocent men unjustly incarcerated.

Capitalism has many terrible and deadly weapons: the so-called justice system is but one of them.

What madness is this? *Talking Back* will give you the answer.

Ray Jackson, a member of the Aboriginal stolen generations, was the President of the Indigenous Social Justice Association. His review was published shortly before his death on April 23, 2015 at age 73.