

WRITERS FROM A DYING RACE (BLACK POETS IN AUSTRALIA)

By L.E. Scott



The indigenous people of Australia, now known as the Aborigines, are dying. The cause of their death is no secret. The white man 'discovered' Australia two hundred years ago and a race of Black people began to die.

Kevin J. Gilbert, an Aborigine writer, says of his people: "My people are like kangaroos sitting on a bush road at night when the spotlight hits. They just sit there waiting for it."

Before the written word

The Aborigines are in deep trouble. Not only must they overcome the everyday threat of extermination, but they must also struggle against the worst disease that can eat away at man — the belief that he just might be "inferior".

In the words of Kevin J. Gilbert, "Ever since the invasion of our country by English soldiers and then colonists in the late eighteenth century, Aborigines have endured a history of land theft, attempted racial extermination, oppression, denial of basic human rights, actual and de facto slavery, ridicule, denigration, inequality and paternalism. Concurrently, we suffered the destruction of our entire way of life — spiritual, emotional, social and economic. The result is the Aboriginal of twentieth cen-

tury Australia — a man without land, without an identity, a culture or a future.

"It is true that the modern Aborigine is sick, very sick. But let no white person use this as an excuse to denigrate him even further. You cannot look down on Black people while you understand the historical reasons that have reduced them to what they are — the reasons of which I have here sketched only a tiny, general impressionistic fraction. Remember that the Aborigine's sickness has been forced upon him. Yours, you not only tolerate, but structured into the very fibre of your society."

The shame/the game

Lock a man in a dark room, cut him off from any contact other than that which you want him to have, tell him that he came from nothing, make him totally dependent on you for his existence; after two hundred years of this, you have a man who hates himself and his kind. One of the worst sins man can

commit against man, is to set out to create a system to try and destroy a man's mind simply because that man is Black.

It is a cold hard fact that many Aborigines are ashamed of their blackness. It is no accident that this is so for the reason behind it is as old as mankind itself. To gain control over a race of people, they must first be divided.

In many cases, Aborigines who have "white blood" in them do not want to relate to their darker, "inferior" family members. The white man has burned into their minds for over two hundred years that anything black is no good, nothing, and inferior to anything white or near white. To make his point even stronger, the white man treated those whose mothers he had raped, a "little bit better" than the darker ones.

This is the same skin game the white man in America played with Black Americans. Some Black Americans also felt ashamed of their blackness. Then "Black is Beautiful" happened, and the wall between black and black began to fall away. This will happen in Australia as the long overdue voices of the poets reach the Black people of Australia with their cry: "Brother, Brother, Brother, a house divided cannot stand."