

Black Diggers- Tom Wright/The Longest Memory- Fred d'Aguiar

Black Diggers Background Information

Cultural implications- memorial to Indigenous Australian soldiers, adding to the ANZAC story. Contradictory accounts (unreliable narrator). Personal truth:, Healing truth: literature as a form of catharsis, Social truth:. Archetypes: covers multiple stories on a broad perspective. "Black Diggers" is a narrative which should be a catalyst for change. Mateship

Purpose of the Text: Recognise the indigenous Australians who fought in World War I as part of the mainstream historical narrative. Make their service part of the public discourse. Explore how war and conflict can be an equaliser. Highlights the array of racism. Explore the experience of loss of innocence/ignorance.

Overview: A multi dimensional story composed of many individual experiences. The indigenous Australian men fight alongside with non-indigenous soldiers in World War I. Indigenous soldiers wanted to participate in and seek recognition from a community which otherwise considered them second-class. It also shows the common experience of a return in a position of disadvantage and dispossession after the war.

Historical Truth: The play is based on historical records of indigenous servicemen who fought in World War I. The play seeks to redress the intentional omission in most if not all historical accounts of the war about these indigenous men who volunteer to fight for the newly formed country called Australia. The heroic and patriotic actions of the black diggers were met, not with praise, acceptance and egalitarianism, but with marginalisation, maltreatment and rejection. Indigenous people weren't citizens until 1949. genuine camaraderie that ignores old racial boundaries grows between the soldiers. The old racist ways remain unchanged to this day, the black diggers are denied the treatment afforded to other war veterans.

Race Relations: The White Australia policy (Immigration Restriction Act 1901) allowed discrimination against non-white individuals entering the country. It helped to perpetuate the idea of white superiority and the exclusion of non-white members of the community. The conflict between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is illustrated by Wright. Physical violence: massacre in opening scene. Verbal abuse: Aggressive private on the ship. Discrimination/infringement of rights: Indigenous men not allowed in pubs.

Military context: Australia as part of the British Empire, was involved from the beginning of World War I. At least a thousand men who enlisted were indigenous. Many indigenous men were only able to join the army if they could hide their indigenous identity (there may be more unknown stories of indigenous soldiers still to be recognised). Only around half of the Australian soldiers returned alive and without serious injury. This is reflected by the loss of life in several scenes in Black Diggers and in the shock and adjustment faced by those who did make it home.

Genre: It's a serious play- it has characteristics of black comedy which deals with events and situations that are tragic, taboo or grotesque. A larrikin quality is often associated with the national mythology of mateship and courage on the front lines in the armed forces. It also shares characteristics with two closely linked theatrical forms: documentary drama and verbatim theatre. Documentary drama uses events and sometimes words directly from real life (from sources such as news media and journalisms).

Structural Features: The play spans over one century, series of vignettes, showcases 4 types of truth, is episodic and fragmented, short and sharp scenes, gaps/silences for audience to fill with prejudice, Nigel is the only linear character, not reliant on character development to tell stories (they're archetypes thus vessels of expressing ideologies). Dispersed story telling, black and white dichotomy in a post-colonial setting, most meaning is implied. Polyphonic narrative shows a diverse point of view and an array of voices. The fragmented nature conveys the shell shock experienced as a result of war or inequality. Able to cover an array of different narrative. By jumping, it creates a patchwork quilt of the past. Nine indigenous characters are the focus. Due to this, the voice and language varies greatly depending on the narrative. Multi-modal: dialogue, hymns, poems, war songs, letters, transcripts/recordings. Act 1 is heavily plot driven whereas Act 2 is layered with emotionally charged scenes, loss and trauma.

Language: Australian language eg colloquialisms, idiom, banter, swearing. Derogatory, racist and offensive language towards Aborigines. These words are primarily associated with African Americans- reinforcing the lack of knowledge about our indigenous Australians. Education and religious beliefs are shown through language. **Tone:** disillusionment, dignity, hope, culturally-specific black humour, ironic. Many symbols eg social Darwinism, policies, police, army recruitment, uniform, war, iron harvest/shrapnel, fence, irrigation, land, red carpet, town show. Reoccurring symbols/motifs include: letters, light/dark, silhouettes, religion, war songs, cigarettes, Tarzan/ape, beer, circus, lock of hair, silence, ellipsis.

Character Notes "Black Diggers"

Nigel Core Ideas: Social Darwinism, curiosity (something to be observed), loss of identity/belonging, caught between two worlds, reflects trauma of colonialism. **Structural Functions:** Opens and closes the play, based on Douglas Grant, Editor/Tarzan time skip, used by white characters and ultimately is discarded. **Language Features:** Scientific/technical, highly formal and educated, **Relationships:** Taxidermist, Editor, Professor, Reporter and Psychiatric nurse view him condescendingly **Quotes:** "I don't belong", "full blood...perfect specimen", "grown-up world is complicated...difficult", "plenty of time for the truth (indigenous Australians are marginalised)"

Bertie Core Ideas: Trauma, ignorance of youth, impact of cultural loss, hope/idealistic, 3 generations of indigenous Australian mistreatment, lack of means of coping with loss of beliefs and rituals, seeing is believing. He also lives in the past but for a different reason (trauma) to the other black diggers (racial equality). **Structural Features:** initially eager to fight in WWI for indigenous recognition, mentally deteriorates (silence, lock of hair, standing at attention) **Language Features:** Silent when broken by trauma, reoccurring motifs **Relationships:** Other black diggers treat him as a one of their own, mum and grandpa comment on his naivety, breaks when an unfamiliar aboriginal man was killed. **Quotes:** "dearest little black mate", "big show of light and excitement", "Nothing. Nobody", "(I) shouldn't be here", "(Frank's) soul will be stuck here"

Frank/Ghost Core Ideas: Cultural impact of not returning home, dispossession, explores the idea of memory **Structural Functions:** costume of white ochre, reflects temporary fame, monologue. **Language Features:** unnamed when deceased, no full stops, stream of consciousness, legacy of hair **Relationships:** Bertie is the guardian of his soul, **Quotes:**

Harry/Stan Core Ideas: Harry is traditional indigenous Australian, unending battle against racism, lampshades an invasion/dispossession, demonstrates interracial friendship and the impact of the return home from war. Stan is a representation of how complex racism is due to his inability to help Harry (Reinforces that an individual cannot make social change and collective effort is needed)

Structural Functions: Harry builds up turmoil of indigenous Australians. Before: discriminated. During: Protects. Return: Discrimination breaks him. Stan functions as a guide to Harry. **Language Features:** Harry uses Australian slang, beer. Stan is worthy enough to be named due to his attitude. **Relationships:** Stan and Harry share moments of camaraderie with other white soldiers and fellow indigenous diggers. **Quotes:**

Ern Core Ideas: PTSD. Trauma of the past. Hope for reconciliation. Resurfacing of systematic racism from the depths of society “dark dark blood”. Post-war isolation of all soldiers. Not even indigenous Australian families helped the returned aboriginal soldiers. Not fitting the white Anzac narrative. **Structural Features:** Starts off by enlisting and getting rejected. He then changes his name to a comedically white name, and gets accepted. Loses his arm to defend Australia. Thinks that it would be enough to ‘be somebody’ in Australia, makes being at war feel worthwhile. Similar to Bob and Norm, this isn’t enough to achieve respect from Australians. Giving medals to fellow white soldier so he doesn’t sell it off to buy alcohol. Represents his lack of need to be remembered in the war as his involvement wasn’t recognised at all. His own family aren’t interested in taking the medals because indigenous don’t care about their own soldiers. Loses name when elderly (people forgot about him). **Language Features:** Gaps to expose the audience's internal racism. **Relationships:** Bob and Norm, RSL Chemist **Quotes:**

Norm/Bob Core Ideas: Structural Functions: Relationships: Quotes:

Mick Core Ideas: Enlivened by war. Racism is different between countries. Wants to fight oppression. Taste of equality. War hero. **Structural Functions:** Represents changes in racism between home and war. Comfortable with white soldiers. Wants hope at the end of the play. **Language Features:** Polite, diplomatic, assertive and articulate speech. **Relationships:** Camaraderie with Archie, belligerent with the public servant. **Quotes:**

Laurie Core Ideas: Presents a potential way to cope with the trauma of warfare per se and being mistreated by institutionalised racism (religion). Is one of the happier endings. **Structural Functions:** Is largely independent of the other black diggers and hence has more individuality. Ultimately, even his relatively good post war life is still plagued by a lack of self esteem. **Language Features:** Formal and educated yet colloquial when self deprecating. Timid when he returned from war. **Relationships:** not much interaction with indigenous characters, meaningful connections with white characters through discussions of religion. **Quotes:** “arriving uninvited on someone's beach”, “see in the dark”, “better camouflage in the dark”, “pretty wretched”, “put it all behind you”.

Archie Core Ideas: Initially represents essence of the hope that discrimination and dispossession against indigenous Australians will subside post war. Progresses to be less hopeful as the war goes on because experiences change his perception. **Structural Functions:** He writes letters home to reassure family and keep them informed. His letters show his deterioration. **Language Features:** Uses formal and educated language like Nigel. **Relationships:** has family and friends, close relationship with the other black diggers. **Quotes:**

Theme Notes "Black Diggers"

Social Division Core Ideas: The play shows some of the ideas about the phrenology and racism that gained momentum at the time which would lead to further atrocities in Europe during WWII. Anthropological assumptions about alleged characteristics of race, and about the idea that white-skinned people were somehow superior are discredited in this text. The treatment of Australian aborigines was for a long time carried out on the grounds of the perceived racial and cultural

superiority of the whites. The black diggers are seldom allowed to forget that they are seen for their ethnicity first and as soldiers second. **Characters:** Nigel opens and closes the play, representing that racist ideology underpins the narrative. Passages with the taxidermist, editor, professor. **Textual Evidence:** Darwinism is shown through the taxidermist's animalistic references, the professor examining Nigel's skull and the editor's surprised at Nigel's level of education and literacy.

Authority/Submission/Rebellion Core Ideas: The soldiers' experience serves to highlight the injustices of each States Protectorate system, and the casual and institutional racism that humiliated, marginalised and demeaned the black diggers before and after the war. The play shows how the system of 'Aboriginal protection' had become a system of enforced compliance and denial of human rights. Attempts to obtain power by oppressed soldiers, or even to simply determine their own courses of action, invariably fail. **Characters:** RSL Secretary, Churchgoer, Enlistment Officers. Mick's pleas for land equity and reimbursement show that he feels he has risked his life for a 'better Australia' and he is disillusioned when he is denied fundamental rights because he is Indigenous. This represents how the Indigenous community fundamentally lack power throughout the entirety of the play.

Introduction to "The Longest Memory"

A glimpse at American Slavery: In 1619 the Dutch introduced the first captured Africans to America. They brought the slaves to the North American colony of Jamestown Virginia. Slavery occurred primarily between the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution because Americans want to increase profit by reducing costs. Slavery was widespread in the 17th and 18th centuries, African American slaves helped build the economic foundations of the new nation. The South was the most dangerous area for African Americans and even after the Emancipation, there is still racial tensions through the civil rights movement.

Slaves in the antebellum (pre Civil War) South constituted about 1/3 of the southern population. Most slaves lived on large farms or small plantations; many masters owned less than 50 slaves. Slave owners sought to make their slaves completely dependent on them. They were prohibited from learning to read and write and their behaviour and movement was restricted. Many masters raped the slave women and rewarded obedient behaviour with favours while rebellious slaves were brutally punished. A strict hierarchy among slaves (from privileged house slaves and skilled artisans down to lowly field hands) helped keep them divided and less likely to organise a Rebellion against their masters. Slave marriages had no legal basis but slaves did marry and raise large families; most slave owners encouraged this practice. Slave revolts did occur within the system but few were successful. The 13th Amendment officially abolished slavery but free blacks' status in the post-war South remained precarious and significant challenges awaited during the reconstruction period.

Fred d'Aguiar: "My attempt to fill in the gaps (link to patchwork quilt) of an eradicated past (link to forgotten history of indigenous diggers) and to understand history through personality, through people and their experiences rather than by a rehearsal of dates and events. A society is best understood by its treatment of its poor and powerless.