

Megan Davis and George Williams. *Everything You Need to Know about the Uluru Statement from the Heart*. NewSouth Publishing: Sydney, 2021. 220 pages. AUS\$23.75 ISBN: 9781742237404; eBook \$12.99 ISBN: 9781742245300.

Australia is in the midst of a debate around the role of Indigenous people in the legal document that underpins the nation-state of Australia's governance system—the Australian Constitution. *Everything You Need to Know About the Uluru Statement from the Heart* (henceforth, *Everything You Need to Know*) is a timely and useful handbook to help the reader understand how we have arrived at this position, and what is at stake in the coming months and years. This book was authored by Professors Megan Davis and George Williams. Both authors are experienced constitutional lawyers and experts in Australian and international Indigenous rights and constitutional recognition. Professor Davis was also a member of the Prime Minister's Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition for Indigenous Australians, and of the Referendum Council. This experience provides important context as the authors describe the processes that led to the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Starting with the 60,000-plus years of Indigenous inhabitation on this Country that we now know as Australia, *Everything You Need to Know* takes the reader on a journey of constitutional reform. The book is written for a general audience and provides the reader with an overview of the events that led to the Uluru Statement. As seen in the writing of a Constitution that ignored the presence of Indigenous people (only including Aboriginal people in order to exclude them, in the case of section 51(xxvi), which was changed in the 1967 Referendum), *Everything You Need to Know* highlights the bind that Indigenous people are in today. Although there has been no legal basis for the colonisation of Australia (with the 1992 Mabo Decision overturning the idea that Australia was *terra nullius*, or a land without people), Indigenous people find themselves negotiating with an introduced government to have a better say in the issues that affect their lives.

The arguments for constitutional change to achieve these mechanisms of change, which have been laid out in detail in other places are collated in this book. Statute law can be altered by the government of the day, whereas constitutional change can only be achieved through the affirmation of a majority of voting citizens in a majority of states. It is for this reason that the Uluru Statement addresses the Australian people. *Everything You Need to Know* forms part of the campaign to educate the broader Australian public about Indigenous people's position within the Australian legal landscape, and how Indigenous people have continually worked to change the nature of this relationship to better engage their rights as the original inhabitants of this land.

Structurally, the book lays out the hundreds of years of Indigenous political action that led to the Uluru Statement, exploring the setting, contentions, and outcomes of major historical events such as the formation of the Australian Constitution, the 1967 Referendum, numerous calls for treaties, and the 30-odd year process to recognise Indigenous people in the Australian Constitution. The book then focuses in detail on the Uluru Statement itself, outlining the independent Regional Dialogues that were held in the lead-up to the National Convention, and the underpinning philosophies behind the calls for Voice, Treaty, and Truth. Where the Uluru Statement is emotive and poetic, *Everything You Need to Know* is more factual: a well-researched history that includes enough detail to ensure that even a well-informed reader learns something new in every chapter. To say it is factual, however, is not to say that the book is dry. Instead, it is underpinned by a continual tension between recognition and self-determination, between symbolic and practical, and between Indigenous agendas and the bureaucratic inertia of the Australian state. *Everything You Need to Know* carefully details the points of contention that demarcate the symbolic from the practical (and arguably therefore, recognition from self-

determination). One example of the latter, and which demonstrates the importance of substantive change, is the move to amend or delete section 51(xxvi) of the Constitution. This section enables the Australian Government to make laws on the basis of race, and it featured heavily in the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition for Indigenous Australians' discussions. Section 51(xxvi) is used to pass legislation that advances Indigenous causes. It has also been used to discriminate against Indigenous people and their interests whilst protecting the sovereignty of the Australian state (such as in the Hindmarsh Bridge Act Case of 1996). Following the Regional Dialogues, the amendments were shelved as delegates were not convinced that the proposed changes would guarantee that Indigenous people could still receive benefit and receive protection against negative discrimination. Rather, delegates favoured constitutional amendments that they thought could lead to more substantive changes to advance Indigenous people.

The movement from Indigenous recognition to Indigenous self-determination possibly has some of the greatest lessons for scholars of literary studies to consider, and these lessons about the importance of political as well as symbolic representation no doubt have analogues in the literary sphere. This opens the question of what Indigenous self-determination may look like in the field of Australian Literature.

Certainly, time alone will tell whether the proposed changes will ultimately lead to improved outcomes for Indigenous people. However, *Everything You Need to Know* contains clues that might inform the 2023 Referendum. The 1967 Referendum removed the clause in Section 51(xxvi) that stated that the federal government could not make laws for the members of the Aboriginal race. The 1967 Referendum did not lead to any immediate change for Indigenous people. The government of the day, led by Prime Minister Harold Holt, saw no reason to introduce new legislation to support Indigenous people, despite the overwhelming public sentiment that saw Indigenous affairs as a priority. A successful 2023 Referendum is also unlikely to lead to overnight change, and many may be disappointed in the slow pace in the months and years following the vote. What the 1967 Referendum did achieve (as may the 2023 Referendum) was the legislative infrastructure to allow for later governments to introduce reform, such as that achieved by Whitlam's government.

Everything You Need to Know should provide readers with some confidence that the mandate of Voice, Treaty, and Truth is not a whim, or a politically engineered outcome, or a naïve mission. Rather, the book goes to some length to describe the processes of education and dialogue that led to the Statement, as well as the disagreements and differences of opinion along the way. One example of this is the focus on truth-telling, which did not appear on the original list of options presented to the Regional Dialogues. It was the insistence with which this issue was independently raised by Indigenous traditional owners, organisational representatives, and individuals that led to its inclusion. The descriptions of the Dialogues also demonstrate a pragmatic realism amongst participants. Many Indigenous people hold a critical understanding of the interface between Indigenous agendas and government processes, the limits of political action, and the cost to Indigenous people of chasing ideas that have little chance of success. Instead, *Everything You Need to Know* emphasises the careful and strategic approach that those behind the Uluru Statement, and the communities who align themselves therewith, are taking, complete with a critical awareness of the costs and benefits.

Everything You Need to Know works for multiple audiences: it is both an educative read for those wishing to inform themselves about the 2023 Referendum and a reference book for students and academics across a range of disciplines including literary studies, law, history, political science, and Indigenous studies.

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