

BOOK REVIEW



Leah Purcell talks it up with:

Cilla Malone

Deborah Mailman

Frances Rings

Kathryn Hay

Liza Fraser-Gooda

Rachel Perkins

Rosanna Angus

Sharon Finnan

Tammy Williams

LEAH PURCELL: *BLACK CHICKS TALKING*
Published by Hodder Headline Australia, 2002
ISBN: 0733610706

Reviewed by JILPIA JONES*

Talented Film and Stage actor, Leah Purcell has brought together a group of young Aboriginal women so they can share their experiences. What is it like to be an Aboriginal woman in Australia in the early 21st century, and what problems, if any, they met, in establishing and maintaining their identity.

Purcell does not pretend that the group she has assembled is necessarily representative of Indigenous womanhood (or should one say sisterhood). She comes from Queensland, so by necessity, many of the group have their origins in that state. But there is a reasonable spread, from Rosanna Angus, whose people are about as 'traditional' as any in the country, to Kathryn Hay, who grew up away from her people and is on her journey to establish a firm Aboriginal identity.

These women are, with perhaps one exception, achievers and it may be this that accounts for the fact that only three of the ten mention having a child or children.

Perhaps the early childbearing which was the initiation rite for young black women is slowly giving way to a different set of rites; and does this have any connection with the fact that two of the ten who grew up in a settlement or mission followed the custom and had children early, while the eight who grew up in the larger community are childless so far.

Purcell's interviews are lengthy and thorough, but sometimes could be structured better. Her technique of not devoting a chapter to herself, but interrupting while interviewing the others to tell about herself is an interesting one, but can irritate the reader at times.

Her inclusion of her cousin is interesting, since she is the one person who fits the racist stereotype of an Aboriginal - drunken, disorganised and promiscuous. Did Purcell include her as a stark contrast to the other girls? But then we Blacks do let it all hang out.

Feminists may express concern about the title of this book in the sense that 'chicks' may be seen as sexist. What you call each other in a group can be very different when others outside the group use the same term. My generation may have comfortably referred to us as 'gins' despite its historical connotations.

If they are a sample of the current generation of Indigenous women, we have little to fear for the future. These girls are deadly!

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