



Killing Rage, Ending Racism

by bell hooks; Henry Holt and Company, New York 1995; \$16.95 softcover.

Killing Rage by bell hooks flows like a river over vast terrain, seeking a place that is free of the domination and destruction of white male power. Being black struggles against invisibility. hooks speaks of 'white supremacy' and its power to make black invisible.

...black folks were compelled to assume the mantle of invisibility, to erase all traces of their subjectivity during slavery and the long years of racial apartheid, so that they could be better, less threatening servants. [p.35]

The invisibility hook writes about continues today:

Even though legal racial apartheid no longer is a norm in the United States, the habits that uphold and maintain institutionalized white supremacy linger. Since most white people do not have to 'see' black people (constantly appearing on billboards, television, movies, in magazines, etc.) and they do not need to be ever on guard nor to observe black people to be safe, they can live as though black people are invisible. [p.36]

The illusion of invisibility becomes a weapon of domination. hooks' rage speaks also to my situation, indigenous to this place we call australia.

Despite the incredible changes in the structure of racism in this country, we still live within a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal society that must attack and assault the psyches of black people (and other people of colour) to perpetuate and maintain itself. [p.144]

Some individuals however, have survived and learned to think outside the imposed regime. hooks is a survivor. And the medicine for survival prescribed by hooks, is to decolonise and dissolve white thinking. While also re-learning the love of (otherness) blackness.

Unlike most mainstream academics bell hooks writes about day to day life, confronting the hard questions for black peoples. Sexism in black communities.

Extreme expressions of sexism, misogyny, made visible by overt exploi-

tation of women by men, become in their minds a dysfunctional response to racism rather than a perspective that exists both apart from and in conjunction with racism. Such thinking enables black males to assume no direct accountability for a politics of sexism that in reality does not have its origin in racist aggression. To see sexism as an outcome of racist victimization is to construct a worldview wherein black males can easily deflect attention away from the power and privileges accorded them by maleness within white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, however relative, even as they simultaneously undermine the seriousness of sexist exploitation by insisting that the problem is ultimately, and always, only racism. [pp.86-7]

hooks rages against white women for their complicity in maintaining racism. Feminism in one of its interactions with black women is accused of being simply about responding to the actions of men, particularly at the time of the Clarence Thomas hearings. We are not, however, left with nowhere to go on this one. hooks suggests to us that:

... the moment white and black females refuse to compete with one another an important intervention happens: the existing sexist/racist structure is disrupted. If that will to compete is replaced with a longing to know one another, a context for bonding can emerge. [p.223]

hooks sees a future, a future involving love of community, the revival of old fashioned traditions of caring, sharing and healing and the renewal of the black community in america today. Her vision of course could be applied outside afro-america. Its application and potential is universal. • IW

Final Jeopardy

By Linda Fairstein; Warner Books (Penguin) 1997; 392 pp; \$14.95; softcover.

Linda Fairstein is an Assistant District Attorney in New York City and chief of the Sex Crimes Unit. She has been involved with some high profile prosecutions including the Central Park Jogger case. In terms of legal and forensic background, Fairstein is obviously well qualified to write a crime novel al-

though I can't imagine how she found the time. As one of the characters says near the end of *Final Jeopardy*, a sex crimes prosecutor is never likely to be short of work.

Final Jeopardy is a well paced, suspenseful novel full of convincing plots twists. Fairstein manages to discuss various types of sex crimes, from stalking to serial rape, without sliding into the gratuitous titillation that characterises too much of the writing in this genre. Using a prosecutor's perspective enables her align herself firmly with the survivors of sexual assault.

The main character, Alexandra Cooper, is clearly drawn from the author's own experiences although I hope the latter's taste in lovers is a little better. Coop, as she is known by her police colleagues, has an appealing commitment and intelligence. Her male cop sidekick is predictably dependable and provocatively non-PC.

The link that Fairstein draws between the danger of the title and the TV game show *Jeopardy* allows her to introduce some interesting general knowledge trivia into the novel which makes it all the more readable. *Final Jeopardy* is a strong first attempt at crime fiction and excellent fodder for the bath or a holiday. • FW

Counsel of Perfection — The Family Court of Australia

by Leonie Star; Oxford University Press 1996; 251 pp; \$24.95; softcover.

Leonie Star is a legal historian whose latest book documents the evolution of the Family Court of Australia in honour of its 20th birthday. Star pays homage to the many counsel who have shaped the Family Court with a goal to perfecting it. Elizabeth Evatt, Lionel Murphy, Ray Watson and, at times, Alastair Nicholson are praised for their innovative and ambitious reforms of family law.

The book begins with a fascinating account of family law in Western history. Flashback to the 19th century

when bigamy, murder and wife sale were realistic alternatives to costly divorce. Star then outlines the development of the Family Court. Her account is socially and politically well informed. However, I do not entirely agree that the legal snobbery towards family law is due to Evatt being a woman — the snobbery continues with Nicholson at the helm. Of note, is Star's treatment of the violence that has surrounded the Family Court, especially the moving account of Pearl Watson's murder.

The book should be of interest to family law practitioners who want to know more about the major players — there are lots of well researched quotes and stories. Whilst the book states that it is aimed at non legal readers, I am not quite sure if there will be such an audience.

Counsel of Perfection is released when there is a conservative federal government whose probable impact on family law will make the contributions of Murphy, Evatt, Watson and Nicholson to the Family Court seem even more special, creative and outstanding. As the Howard axe continues to kill legal aid and emasculates Family Court funding of primary dispute resolution and initiatives to increase minority groups' access to the Court, the Evatt concept of a 'helping court' is fading into non-existence. • MK

Face the Facts: Some Questions and Answers About Immigration, Refugees and Indigenous Affairs

**Federal Race Discrimination
Commissioner, HREOC 1997; 33
pp; no charge.**

Zita Antonios, the Race Discrimination Commissioner, has released a much needed booklet aimed at debunking some of the myths that have flourished during the recent race 'debate'.

Face the Facts uses a question and answer format that, as the title suggests, aims to provide the reader with facts about as well as perspectives on immigration and Indigenous issues.

For example, it is a fact that rates of unemployment for recent arrivals are higher than for those people who have been in Australia for some time but research indicates that these rates do not

have a significant impact on the overall national unemployment rate.

The material is concisely and persuasively presented as well as being comprehensively sourced.

It is encouraging to see a useful official response to the bile being peddled by racist members of Parliament — not all of whom have red hair as the proponent of the ten point sham has proven. • FW

The Joke's on Lawyers

**by Stan Ross; Federation Press
1996; 107 pp \$19.95 softcover.**

Understanding Ethics

**by Noel Preston; Federation Press
1996; 219 pp \$25.00 softcover.**

One reason for reviewing both these books for a publication like the *Alternative Law Journal* is that, in different ways, they might have an influence on the lawyers who get around to reading them. The first, *The Joke's on Lawyers*, by helping them to understand their weak points via the educative medium of humour and the second, *Understanding Ethics*, by providing the misguided with ...well with guidance, I guess.

Those who have been inducted into the profession in recent years would find this instruction superfluous as young law graduates are currently subject to processes that ensure they are imbued with the necessary ethical principles. Speaking as someone in the final throes, I can say with confidence that I have been fully schooled in the importance of being nice to all and making sure that my arse is covered.

Two lawyers, Joe and Paul, are standing in the queue at their local branch of the Commonwealth Bank when three masked armed robbers burst into the bank. They have everyone drop to the floor and one robber starts emptying out the tellers' tills while another keeps guard and the third starts collecting the wallets, jewellery etc. Joe suddenly pushes something into Paul's pocket and Paul whispers: 'What is it?' Joe replies softly: 'It's the hundred dollars I borrowed from you last week.'

In *The Joke's On Lawyers*, Stan Ross says that by compiling jokes such as the one above he hopes to 'accomplish some positive contribution to the debate over the legal profession's role in our society'. By this he means making law-

yers aware that some citizens find them devious, pompous, obsessed with money, too numerous or just plain unpleasant and that these feelings often lead to lawyer jokes. He argues that by taking note of lawyer jokes we can improve ourselves. Unfortunately, burdened by these didactic duties, much of the humour seems a little heavy handed. The book reads like a padded magazine article and would probably appeal to those who find Philip Adams witty.

The back cover of *Understanding Ethics* promises a roller-coaster ride through 'contemporary moral dilemmas concerning: truth telling, sexuality, abortion, euthanasia, the environment, war, politics, capital punishment, business and global poverty' finishing with 'a challenging chapter, Cultivating an Ethical Life'.

The book contains two illustrations that given an insight into its approach. In one a boy frowns at a pile of blocks, in the other a girl smiles at a jigsaw puzzle. Noel Preston has distilled ethical theories into models and processes that can be mixed, matched and applied to various dilemmas. The result is advice such as:

For the responsible moral self, the truth is not merely spoken: it must be lived. The one who follows this pathway consistently, in whatever role in life, fashions a life of integrity.

Were it that simple. As admirable as the ideals that it discusses may be, this is a book that plods along and rarely engages the reader. The various ethical models are applied to a wide range of case studies but the discussion often seems superficial. The impression I gained was of a fairly comprehensive, clearly written secondary school text book. It is hard to imagine *Understanding Ethics* being read in any other context. • ME

BITS was compiled by Michael Easton, Miiko Kumar, Irene Watson and Frith Way.