

Frontier Justice

A History of the Gulf Country to 1900

Tony Roberts

A challenging and illuminating history, *Frontier Justice* brings a fresh perspective to the Northern Territory's remarkable frontier era. For the newcomer, the Gulf country – from the Queensland border to the overland telegraph line, and from the Barkly Tableland to the Roper River – was a harsh and, in places, impassable wilderness. To explorers like Leichhardt, it promised discovery, and to bold adventurers like the overlanders and pastoralists, a new start. For prospectors in their hundreds, it was a gateway to the riches of the Kimberley goldfields. To the 2,500 Aboriginal inhabitants, it was their physical and spiritual home.

From the 1870s, with the opening of the Coast Track, cattlemen eager to lay claim to vast tracts of station land brought in massive numbers of cattle and, in the process, wrought destruction on precious lagoons and fragile terrain. Black and white conflict escalated into unfettered violence and retaliation that would extend into the next century, displacing, and in some areas destroying, the original inhabitants.

The vivid characters who people this meticulously researched and compelling history are indelibly etched from diaries and letters, archival records and eyewitness accounts. Included are maps with original place names and previously unpublished photographs and illustrations.

'... a very powerful and important book ... essential reading for anyone with an interest in the story of the Australian frontier. An extremely impressive piece of work.'

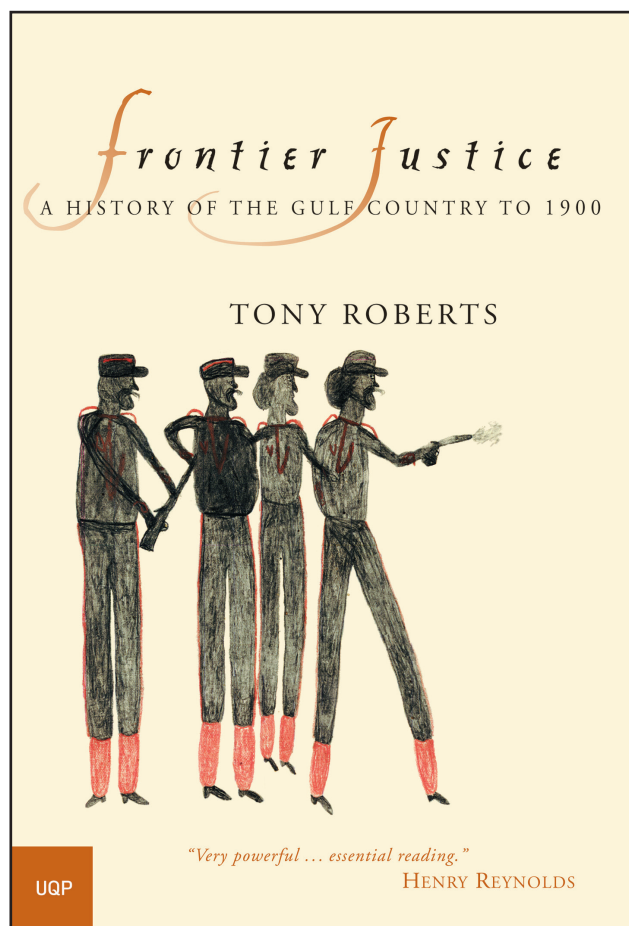
– Professor Henry Reynolds

Winner – 2005 NSW History Prize

Runner-up – 2005 National Literary Awards

Winner – 2006 W.K. Hancock Prize

Winner – 2006 NT Literary Awards



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Reviews

'Tony Roberts's Frontier Justice ... is exemplary: original, meticulous and dispassionate. Roberts, never unsympathetic, seeks to understand both the viewpoint of the settlers and that of the dispossessed.'

– Dr Neal Blewett, **Best Books of the Year, Australian Book Review**

'Tony Roberts ... follows the footpad of diarists, interviewers, linguists, journalists, land rights commissioners and family historians, accumulating evidence that a less attuned researcher might have passed over. His book is like one of those thousand-piece jigsaw

puzzles in which every piece must be examined until its place is found, its contribution to the bigger picture slowly revealed – in all its horror ... Roberts comes along as both detective and latter-day judge, reviewing the evidence in a forensic way, empirical rather than theoretical. I salute the service that this independent historian has done us.'

– Professor Nicholas Jose, **Australian Book Review**



Charley Scrutton, the archetypal frontiersman, prominent in Gulf history
Courtesy Perry Morey

'... an important, compelling and disturbing book.

Historical research and writing of a very high order.'

– Judges, **2005 National Literary Awards**

'... should be compulsory reading for Australians and an excellent refutation of the revisionist history of writers like Keith Windschuttle.'

– Eliza Metcalf, **Australian Bookseller and Publisher**

'At many points in this fine, scholarly and harrowing book, the darker events of Australia's past intersect with happier, more familiar myths. Some of the cattle duffers and bushmen were perhaps worthy of an Errol Flynn movie.'

– Luke Fraser, **Eureka Street**

'Deeply researched and carefully written ... an admirable example of dispassionate scholarship ... Some of the academic participants in the debate about Aboriginal history could learn a thing or two about assessing historical evidence from this former bureaucrat.'

– Howard Willis, **West Australian**

'It is Roberts's principal achievement to document the extent of this violence and abuse, which amounts to a tragedy so profound that it is even beyond the comprehension of most of the present generation of Aborigines in the region.'

– Philip Jones, **Weekend Australian**

Frontier Justice is a well-informed, closely researched and absorbing book ... a work of detailed scholarship which ... strips away the romanticised view of the pioneering days ... [a] monumental study of Aboriginal-white frontier relations ... It deserves to be in every school, university and public library.'

– Greg Marks, **Indigenous Law Bulletin**

'... an outstanding contribution to history ... I can think of no other study of the Australian frontier that is so thorough and systematic in its portrayal of inter-racial violence ... It is well written with a strong and clear narrative that avoids unnecessary theorising ... Roberts is now well advanced with the sequel to Frontier Justice that takes the story to 1950. I look forward to its appearance.'

– Professor David Carment, **Aboriginal History**

'By his careful reading of the evidence so that the stories of both sides are made available, Roberts has delivered a kind of justice that seemed missing in the past.'

– Judges, **2005 New South Wales History Prize**