



**AIATSIS**  
Australian Institute of Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander Studies

# MEDIA RELEASE

*Worldwide knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present*

**WEDNESDAY, 28 APRIL 2004**

<b>What:</b>	Launch of the book <i>Reading Doctors' Writing: Race, politics and power in Indigenous health research 1870-1969</i> (David Piers Thomas)
<b>Launched by:</b>	Ms Pat Anderson, Chairperson of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, Darwin
<b>When:</b>	6pm, Wednesday 28 April 2004
<b>Where:</b>	<i>Health 2004 Conference</i> Main Foyer/Atrium @ Melbourne Exhibition & Convention Centre Cnr Flinders and Spencer Streets, Melbourne

A book described as "a major contribution to cross-cultural understanding" will be launched during the Health 2004 Conference today (Wednesday, 28 April).

*Reading Doctors' Writing: Race, politics and power in Indigenous health research 1870-1969* has been published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) through the Aboriginal Studies Press.

The book is a history of the first hundred years of health research about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – a history which the book's author David Piers Thomas says still fuels the suspicion of researchers and research felt by Indigenous people today.

"The way researchers write about Indigenous peoples in medical journals matters," Dr Thomas said.

"These representations have influenced the way all Australians - Indigenous and non-Indigenous - think about Indigenous peoples and their health and illnesses."

"Medical research repeatedly labelled Aboriginal people as an inferior race. Their access to good health care was considered only minimally important because most doctors read, wrote and believed that the demise of the Aboriginal race was inevitable."

"Medical representations of Indigenous people as passive, powerless victims facilitated the denial of their chance to have a say in their own future."

The Chairperson of Darwin's Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, Pat Anderson, said the book made a major contribution to cross-cultural understanding in Australia.

"The book shows us how the culture of the medical men – and they were largely men – determined how they viewed Aboriginal people," Ms Anderson said. "And their views made a major contribution to the way we have been viewed by Australians generally."

"Their notion that European culture alone represented the pinnacle of human civilisation might be quaint if it wasn't for the fact that there are powerful and influential people in Australia whose imagination runs no further than the idea that assimilation into their culture is the greatest gift they can bestow on us."

"There is still only a limited understanding of the fact that each person approaches the interface of two cultures with a ready-made value system."

Dr Thomas said his experiences as a doctor in the Northern Territory had convinced him of the need for more, securely-funded Aboriginal community controlled health services.

The Indigenous program of *Health 2004* aims to expand and build the partnerships needed in Australia and internationally to put Indigenous health on regional and global agendas.

AIATSIS is Australia's premier institution for information about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Amongst other core functions, the Institute promotes scholarly, ethical community-based research and publishes quality research and writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the Aboriginal Studies Press.

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