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# **An Imaginary Dominion**

The Representation and Treatment of Aborigines in South Australia  
1834 - 1911.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between the representation and the treatment of Aborigines in South Australia from 1834 to 1911. What were the images of 'Aboriginality' constructed by colonial society and how did these constructions change through time and differ from one social context to another? Furthermore, what was the relationship between these images and the treatment of Aborigines?

The 'Aborigines' of this study are not the people 'as they were', but as they existed as a product of European colonial imagination. The dominant culture's 'knowledge' of the Aborigines was never merely descriptive, it constituted a construction - a complex of ideas that served to legitimate its dominion. It is argued that the construction of the 'Other' is inexorably linked to the dominant culture's construction of itself. At the time of settlement, representations of Aborigines were bound up in a British imperial perspective and the ideal that they could be incorporated into colonial society; but by Federation a nationalist perspective sought their exclusion from Australian society. As the representations of Aborigines changed through time, they also varied within colonial society - reflecting differing social relationships. While these constructions of the 'Other' may have changed through time, and varied according to the social context, the underlying relationship between knowledge and power - the legitimization of inequality - did not change.