

BOY!

Herald (Melb)
22/2/65

that's still a Territory word for aboriginals

IT is not unusual to hear women speaking of "niggers," even in Darwin's polite society. The word is commonly used by some policemen.

Such words are often associated with an attitude of condescending benevolence that must be infuriating to the aboriginals.

I have often heard young white stockmen addressing a grey-haired aboriginal man as "Boy!"

I have also heard it from elected members speaking in the Northern Territory Legislative Council.

It may spring from a feeling of superiority, or from misplaced benevolence based on the assumption that all aboriginals are really children.

My glossary would also include such derivatives as "a good boy," "a cheeky boy," and "a useless boy."

"A good boy" is not only a hard worker but one who accepts his directions and handouts from the boss without question.

"A cheeky boy" is inclined to "talk back", or seek improvements to his wage or living conditions.

"A useless boy" is generally "a useless nigger." He is the aboriginal equivalent of the European who is less than brilliant, and a little slow to react to his employer's wishes.

If he should be bucked from a horse or lose part of a mob of cattle — though that happens also to white stockmen — his title will be embroidered with a few adjectives.

Women are either "girls", "lubras" or "gins". Man and wife may be "a buck and his gin" or "a nigger and his gin".

MOST of these phrases are generally used without the malice of Americans discussing negroes.

Three inevitable glossary entries, heard throughout north and central Australia, would be "I know blacks" (with the emphasis on "know"), "I've worked blacks all my life," and "I've grown up with blacks."

Each is often followed by "You've got to treat them like children" or "I know how to treat them."

It should not be thought that such phrases are confined to any group of employers.

I have heard them on cattle stations and in towns, on government settlements and even on Christian missions.

A year ago the Director of Social Welfare, Mr H. C. Giese, replying to a question in the Legislative Council, said that words such as "boy," "lubra," and "gin" had been banned to welfare officers.

They had been used in official correspondence by people who were paid to help the aboriginals towards self-respect.

They were told in a memorandum that the use of the word "boy," in particular, with its derivation from the status of servility of a houseboy or servant, was most inappropriate.

I HAVE been assured repeatedly by employers that "the blacks have to be kept under the thumb."

"I KNOW blacks. I've worked them all my life and that's the only way to deal with them," you are told, as though being given a lesson in how to work horses.

It has always seemed to me that there are good and bad among them, just as there are good and bad Europeans.

One can only hope for the day when they'll be treated on their merits and cease to be lumped together as ethnic idiots.

More than 3000 aboriginal children are now at school in the Northern Territory. Fifteen years ago there were 300. Within another 20 years illiterate natives will be rare.