



The Good Country: The Djadja Wurrung, The Settlers and the Protectors

by **Bain Attwood**

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The Good Country: The Djadja, The Settlers and the Protectors investigates the world of post-European settlement in Victoria, across the country of the Djadja Wurrung. This land, from just north of Ballarat to Boort and Charlton, to Marnoo in the Wimmera and east to Kyneton, is as vast as it is different, ranging from mountains to flat grasslands and riverine environments.

Attwood introduces his subject with a respect that shows a deep understanding of the people that he writes about. His research is wide-ranging and well-documented with thorough referencing, and he put together the jigsaw of evidence in a way that is not only readable but teachable.

The book is divided into six chronological sections, Encounter, Conflict, Frontier, Protection, Refuge and Decline.

'Encounter' paints a picture of initial curiosity that turned to uneasiness, as the Djadja Wurrung became more familiar with the settlers who sought to take their land. Attwood presents evidence suggesting that many Djadja Wurrung thought the newcomers were ghosts of their own ancestors and attempted to include them in their cultural practices.

In 'Conflict,' a number of incidents show the ongoing struggle between the two groups of people. The country was carved up for settlers' pastoral runs that blocked the Djadja Wurrung's traditional access to water. This led to many violent clashes and the loss of many lives.

Through the concept of 'Frontier,' Attwood examines the conduct of the settlers and of the people appointed

by the government to protect the Djadja Wurrung. In a frontier context, it is the role of the settlers to take action to protect their new claims, and the men and women that were at the front line were often cruel and hard, although I was unconvinced by the parallels Attwood drew between the Australian experience and the American West.

'Protection' seeks to show the policies and people put in place to 'protect' the First Australians in their own land. Attwood draws on evidence including letters, government documents and newspaper articles to highlight the vast differences between those who wanted to help and those who actually did. This chapter drives home the governmental disregard for the rights and country of the Djadja Wurrung, and other First Nation people.

In the last two chapters, 'Refuge' and 'Decline,' Attwood further explores the treatment of the Djadja Wurrung people at the hands of the government, and does not shy away from acknowledging the fall of this great people.

As teachers, we recognise that it's important to view Australian history from all points of view and book would be a useful way to give First Nation people a voice in the classroom. It acknowledges that Europeans showed a range of responses, including men such as Edward Parker, as assistant Protector of Aborigines (1841-1848) who tried unsuccessfully to get genuine protection could for the Djadja Wurrung people.

Attwood tell the histories of the Djadja Wurrung with grace and care, and ensures that his readers understand that this is a history that can no longer be ignored or forgotten.