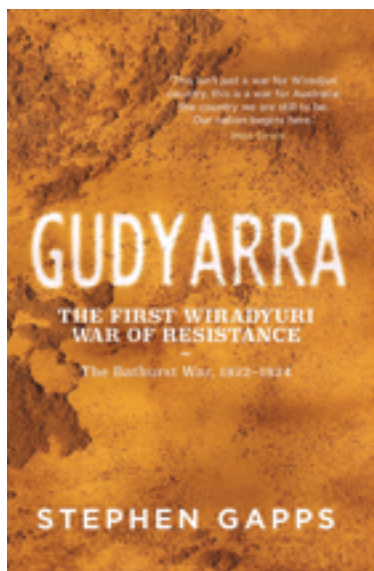


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Gudyarra: The First Wiradyuri War of Resistance—The Bathurst War, 1822–1824

By Stephen Gapps

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NewSouth

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Reviewed by Selena Prior, Federation University

Gudyarra traces the events, interactions and decisions that led to the breakdown of relations between the Wiradyuri people and the colonists in the Bathurst Plains between 1822 and 1824. It is an absorbing and often difficult read.

Gapps has brought the landscape to life, reinforcing the role this country played in the lives of the Wiradyuri, in shaping the actions of the colonists, and in helping to make sense of the historical records of attacks across the regions. While the book follows on from Gapps' earlier history, *The Sydney Wars: Conflict*

in the Early Colony 1788–1817, and assumes that the reader knows something of the first few years of European settlement, it can easily be a stand-alone read.

Through a rich and varied selection of sources, Gapps describes the raids and killings that occurred across isolated stock stations. This account reveals a more complex set of historical actors than others I've read, including not just convict servants and Aboriginal people but soldiers, cows, sheep, horses, militia, Aboriginal guides and mounted people. It provides a perspective that recognises the agency of the Wiradyuri people, in viewing cows and sheep as a new economic resource, and colonists valuing property above those of the lives of Wiradyuri people.

Gapps allows readers to come to their own conclusions, whether that be an awareness of the impact of the obvious gender imbalance and brutal backgrounds of the convicts or the problematic historical figures like Macquarie, who sanitised accounts of the conflicts as civilising while engaging in violent colonial warfare. At times, the detailed nature of Gapps' account of this two-year period is confusing, with people, places and timelines blurring. It is a text that I can imagine reading with students in extracts and using sources, questions and notes to inform and shape learning opportunities.

When I started teaching History, the narrative of the Frontier Wars was that they were not real wars; that while Aboriginal people resisted they could not conduct full-scale warfare. In *Gudyarra*, Gapps outlines accounts of how large warbands—'military units' comprising people from numerous Aboriginal groups—came together to fight across a vast area on multiple fronts. The breadth of sources Gapps has collated clearly educate the reader that this conflict in 1822 was recognised

as a war that was violent, brutal and coordinated.

It is hard not to think of histories in both the Australian and Victorian curriculum that do not meet the criteria of 'difficult histories'—'histories that are central to a national story, challenge conventional narratives of the past, connect to contemporary problems in the national discourse and are often connected to violence perpetuated or condoned by the state'.¹ Having just completed the Holocaust Education Teacher Professional Learning Program through the Jewish Holocaust Centre with my ITE students, I feel a renewed passion for teaching difficult histories. There is no question that teaching difficult histories meaningfully and safely requires knowledge, pedagogy and confidence. By teaching difficult histories, students have the opportunity to use historical thinking skills to interpret, weigh and adjust their understanding of a past that informs their present.

For my students and I, engaging with the 'difficult history' of the Holocaust was personal, powerful and practical, allowing us to 'see a different world from the same window'.² This is the power and possibility of what Gapps has provided in writing *The Sydney Wars* and *Gudyarra*. Gapps' well-referenced and researched work provides teachers and students with an accessible source-based historical account on which to study the 'difficult histories' that shape our present and future.

1 Magdalena H. Gross and Luke Terra, "What Makes Difficult History Difficult?" Phi Delta Kappan, April 30, 2018, <https://kappanonline.org/gross-what-makes-difficulthistory-difficult/>

2 Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2018), 3.