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Roving Mariners: Australian Aboriginal Whalers and Sealers in the Southern Oceans, 1790-1870 (SUNY series, Tribal Worlds: Critical Studies in American Indian Nation Building)

Lynette Russell

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A comprehensive history of Australian Aboriginal whaling and sealing.

For most Australian Aboriginal people, the impact of colonialism was blunt—dispossession, dislocation, disease, murder, and missionization. Yet there is another story of Australian history that has remained untold, a story of enterprise and entrepreneurship, of Aboriginal people seizing the opportunity to profit from life at sea as whalers and sealers. In some cases participation was voluntary; in others it was more invidious and involved kidnapping and trade in women. In many cases, the individuals maintained and exercised a degree of personal autonomy and agency within their new circumstances. This book explores some of their lives and adventures by analyzing archival records of maritime industry, captains' logs, ships' records, and the journals of the sailors themselves, among other artifacts. Much of what is known about this period comes from the writings of Herman Melville, and in this book Melville's whaling novels act as a prism through which relations aboard ships are understood. Drawing on both history and literature, *Roving Mariners* provides a comprehensive history of Australian Aboriginal whaling and sealing.

"Based on solid archival research and the clever joining of fragments, Russell adds literature and photography as well as her own identity and sense of historical curiosity … The book is challenging, thorough and personal, allowing individuals to emerge and rewriting Aborigines into the early colonial years." — *Australian Journal of Politics and History*

"…[an] impressive work … Russell succeeds in telling a story beyond the familiar one of Aboriginal dispossession. Her work serves to highlight the way in which nineteenth-century racial categories that can all too often seem fixed and immutable were in some circumstances more slippery and nuanced." — *H-Net Reviews (H-Empire)*

"Russell takes us into a world colonized by white Europeans, where the Aborigines who weren't wiped out by disease found opportunity, freedom and a certain status by joining the whaling fleet. It was a chance for them to rise in a microcosm of the world—a mixture of races all working together. This is an interesting book. It brings to light a part of the world that has largely been ignored or overlooked. Russell does an excellent job showing us that not all Aborigines were exploited." — *Portland Book Review*

"This engaging investigation into the lives of Aboriginal workers adds to our understanding of how labor, gender, and indigeneity interacted in the early decades of settler colonialism. What makes these particular Aboriginal peoples unique and interesting is how they traveled as part of an industrial workforce, not necessarily as slaves or servants to whites, but in a niche economy that gave them unusual opportunities and positioned them in relationships with whites that were different from how we usually conceptualize Indigenous-European relations in the nineteenth century. This is a fine book." — Nancy Shoemaker, author of *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America*

Lynette Russell is an Australian Research Council Professorial Fellow and Director of the Monash

Indigenous Centre at Monash University. She has written several books, including *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology* (with Ian J. McNiven) and *Savage Imaginings: Historical and Contemporary Constructions of Australian Aboriginalities*.

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