

**The Department of Educational Studies,
The Centre for Culture, Identity and Education,
The David Lam Chair in Multicultural Education and
The Office of the Associate Dean of Indigenous Education**

are pleased to sponsor a talk by

**Professor Michael Singh
University of Western Sydney, Australia**

**Identity Conversion, Citizenship,
and Social Studies:**

**Asian-Australian Perspectives on
Indigenous Reconciliation and
Human Rights**

**Wednesday 22nd March, 2006
Neville Scarfe 308A
Time: 1:00 – 2:15pm**

Light refreshments will be served

MICHAEL SINGH

Governments do more than produce or capitalize on crises by inventing policy improvisations to make interventions in civil society. Because governments have carriage of the state, throughout time they have conducted campaigns for legitimizing themselves and their policies through appeals for the reproduction of a populist national identity wedded to the state. In Australia, the racist project of building a Whites-only Federation, which was initially protected by the United Kingdom, and then by the United States, involved the mobilization of identity “conversion strategies” (Bourdieu, 1984) to produce White Australians who were adverse to the admixture of all non-Europeans, immigrants and Indigenous people alike. Even after the Centenary of Federation, the colonialist legacy of White Australia politics sustains a problematic relationship between Indigenous- and Asian-Australians.

This paper provides an analytical interpretation of interviews with informed and active Australian citizens about their Reconciliation with Indigenous-Australians—interviewees who identify themselves as signifying the complex and differentiated admixture of Asian-Australians. The Reconciliation Movement is a ten year-old citizens’ movement that created opportunities for Indigenous-Australians to recount the legacy of colonialist hatred directed against them, enabling them to publicly reclaim their humanity and a sense of dignity. The doctrine of “terra nullius,” which was in place in Australia for over two hundred years, held that this country was an empty land awaiting British invasion and colonization. The Indigenous Land Rights struggles began with the resistance wars fought by Indigenous warriors, and in 1992 Eddie Mabo won a High Court case that ruled that Indigenous-Australians did, under British law, have the right to Native Title. As a result of this case, Indigenous-Australians could in effect now own or could lay claim to much of the land now claimed by the British Crown during colonisation and now controlled by the Governments of the Australian federation.

However, to put the doctrine of “terra nullius” into effect, Indigenous-Australians were removed by the Federation from their lands and generations of Indigenous children were

effectively stolen by the Federation to be converted into White Australians. Opposed to the Reconciliation Movement is the White Nation movement led by Anglo-fundamentalists such as Pauline Hanson, whose policies were enacted by the current Howard Government in the years since 1996. The Howard Government's failure to respond adequately and appropriately to the Reconciliation Movement has in turn generated the rise of the Reparations Movement. These interviewees are conscious that, as Asian-Australians, the cost of their conversion to White Australians is their rejection of Indigenous-Australians. However, it is argued that such "funds of community knowledge" may supply social studies education with material to explore and help dissolve the technical and arbitrary political divisions that separate Indigenous- and Asian-Australians.

Biographical profile

Professor Michael Singh of the University of Western Sydney, Australia, undertakes comparative cultural studies research in the interdependent areas of education and training, and the multiple levels for effecting reform, so as to explore the intersections of urban, regional and international relations, and is interested in issues of meta-learning. His latest book, *Globalizing Education* (edited with Michael Apple and Jane Kenway), explores the local/global connectedness evident in policies and pedagogies governing education and its reform. His previous book, *Appropriating English* (with P. Kell and A. Pandian) studied innovations in the trans-national business of English language teaching. Professor Singh recently contributed to a study of the motivation and engagement of Indigenous, rural and low-SES boys for the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training. He also participated in a project that looked into ways of enhancing the teacher profession for Teaching Australia, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. In 2005 he convened the international research Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education and served as its President for 2006. Professor Singh has worked as a primary school teacher, teacher-librarian and curriculum consultant as well as providing leadership as head of initial teacher education, head of a school of languages and international studies, and pro-vice chancellor for research and academic affairs.