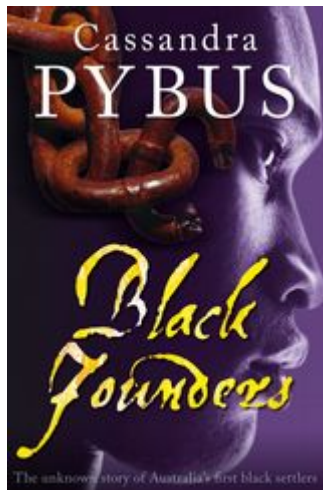


Black Founders: The Unknown Story of Australia's First Black Settlers by Cassandra Pybus. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006, £20.95 Paperback ISBN:086840849 2.



This book is a fascinating account of the stories of the first twelve black settlers of New South Wales. They were not Aborigines as you might expect – Aborigines never saw themselves as settlers – but people from the African diaspora, predominantly, if not all, from the American colonies. Caesar, the first black man to arrive in New South Wales was a First Fleet convict and became Australia's first black bushranger. He was the only one of the twelve to merit attention from authorities mainly due to his numerous attempts at escape and reputation as an outlaw. There is fragmentary evidence about the other black convicts in the papers held at the Mitchell Library in Sydney. John Randall was accepted into the New South Wales Corps as a private in 1800. John Moseley was most likely to have

been descended from the slave labour force of the tobacco plantations of Virginia and Maryland. The most extensive evidence about the origins of the first black settlers is found in the petitions of the ferryman William Blue, who was the first ferryman on Sydney Harbour, after whom Blues Point is named. The majority of the black settlers to arrive in New South Wales were most likely African-Americans who fought for the British in the American Revolution, and subsequently left with the British for the United Kingdom, or initially moved to Nova Scotia and, viewing their harsh new environment, then moved on to England. However, in England, faced with high unemployment, they, like their future white convict compatriots, were convicted of relatively minor offence and were sentenced to transportation to the new penal colony of New South Wales.

Cassandra Pybus undertook painstaking research in archives in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia to piece together this amazing story; a history hitherto largely ignored by Australian society. In the context of an attempt to establish a 'White Australia' at the time of Federation and after, the existence of black immigrants to Australia did not exactly fit the picture. Therefore, early twentieth-century accounts of Billy Blue entirely overlooked the fact of his African heritage and black complexion, so that a foundation legend could be developed in which he could be read as a white man who gave his name to various Sydney landmarks. Pybus argues that 'the tendency to read late nineteenth- and twentieth-century racial assumptions into early colonial Australia is almost universal among historians and social commentators, regardless of what side of the history wars they fight' (p. 180). However, she also maintains that the distinction between black and white was not always clear-cut in early colonial Australia. The presence of black settlers among white ones and Aborigines added a further interesting element to the mix. The strength of this book is the intriguing story it tells and how well it is told. *Black Founders* is a must read for scholars and general readers alike.

JATINDER MANN
University of Sydney