

# JOCK WILLIAM McCULLOCH FASSA FAHA

1945–2018

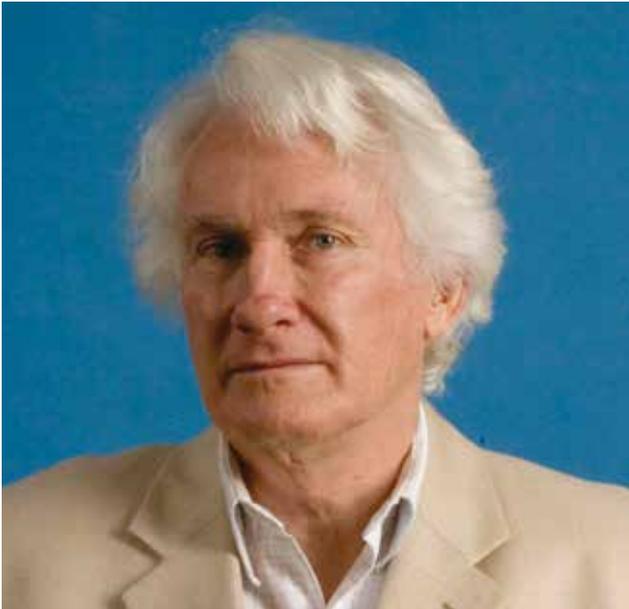


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Jock William McCulloch, a distinguished scholar in the history of medicine and modern South African history, and a tireless advocate for those affected by the ravages of asbestos, passed away on 18 January in Melbourne after a nine month battle with mesothelioma. Perhaps best known for his pioneering work on the human and environmental impact of the global asbestos trade, Jock was a historian of remarkably original achievement across many fields of enquiry, and his work advances our understanding of some of the most controversial and troubling aspects of colonialism's history, including medicine and psychiatry, the history of labour, the history of crime and violence, and occupational disease.

Jock was born in Melbourne on 12 August 1945. After several years studying fine art, he later enrolled at Monash University where he completed his PhD in 1978 with a thesis that focused on the work of Frantz Fanon, the West Indian psychoanalyst, social philosopher and revolutionary. This resulted in his first monograph *Black Soul White Artefact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory* (first published in 1983 and re-released in 2002) which was quickly followed by *In the Twilight of Revolution: The Political Theory of Amílcar Cabral* (1983). Through this early work on Fanon and Cabral, Jock demonstrated his expertise in handling the sometimes complex relationships between colonisation,

race relations, psychiatry, and the role of culture in the development of illness – ideas which continued to underpin his work even as it branched out into different research areas in the later stages of his career. Indeed, throughout the 1980s and 90s Jock published histories of the African anti-colonial struggle alongside studies of crime and colonial psychiatry (*Colonial Psychiatry and the 'African Mind'*) and the medical and social history of asbestos and Agent Orange (*The Politics of Agent Orange: The Australian Experience* and *Asbestos: Its Human Cost*).

In their tribute to Jock, Geoffrey Tweedale and Barry Castleman remark on the role that these early publications played in helping Jock to concentrate his research around a central idea: that of social justice. His first asbestos monograph *The Politics of Agent Orange: The Australian Experience* (1984) was the result of a visiting fellowship at the Social Justice Project (administered through the Australian National University) where Jock was tasked with writing a history of Aboriginal health. This led him to an Aboriginal community at Baryugil, New South Wales, which was the location of an asbestos mine. Jock recognized that, to understand that small community, it was necessary to explore the history of the asbestos industry in Australia. He explored this topic deeper still in *Asbestos: Its Human Cost* (1986) before turning his attention to the South African asbestos mining industry in his much acclaimed *Asbestos Blues: Labour, Capital, Physicians and the State in South Africa* (2002). This study, which emerged from the cross fertilisation of his wide range of interests, marked a major contribution to our understanding of the complicity of some sections of the South African medical profession in the perpetuation of life threatening labour conditions. Taken together with his earlier books on Fanon, Cabral and Agent Orange, it established him at the forefront of scholarship in several major areas of urgent historical and social enquiry.

Jock's interest in the asbestos trade was not limited to scholarly publication—he was a regular participant at academic and activists' conferences and provided help to numerous asbestos victims' groups. He was also an occasional expert witness in litigation and had a strong commitment to policy development, working as a Legislative Research Specialist for the Australian Parliament for a number of years. In 2002, and as a result of an ARC discovery project grant, he co-authored, with

Geoffrey Tweedale, *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and its Fight for Survival*, the first book of its kind to provide a global survey of the asbestos controversy, with detailed accounts and evidence from around the world. It was awarded the Wadsworth Prize by the Business Archives Council in the UK.

For most of his professional career, Jock's academic base was RMIT University where he was Professor of History in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies. He also held positions at Deakin and Monash Universities as well as visiting positions at Columbia University, Johns Hopkins University, Brown University, the University of Zimbabwe and the University of Cape Town. He was an internationalist at heart, and spent much of his time conducting field and archival work in Algeria, Kenya, Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi, Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Jock was elected to the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences in 2004 and the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 2008.

Jock believed that his exposure to asbestos, the predominant cause of mesothelioma, most likely occurred while researching *Asbestos Blues* in South Africa about 20 years before his diagnosis. In the weeks following his passing, tributes appeared from all corners of the globe speaking variously of his sharp mind, his compassion and humour, his drive, and his courage and fairness as a crusader for the rights of asbestos workers and communities. Dedicated to the end, Jock was still working on his last book at the time of his death, with assistance from his partner Professor Pavla Miller. As described by Pavla, it offers 'another lasting testament to his remarkable contribution to historical scholarship and the fight of workers and communities for justice.'

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PAVLA MILLER.