and Jessie Mitchell

Australian History Prize

2019 - Shortlisted

Shortlisted
Judges’ comments

Taking Liberty provides a transformative account of a foundational story of Australian history: the early achievement of responsible government by the Australian colonies, followed by other democratic reforms. For the first time, Ann Curthoys and Jessie Mitchell place questions about Indigenous freedoms at the centre of this story. Exploring each of the colonies’ passages to self-government in turn, their work shows that freedom for settlers was won at the expense of Indigenous Australians’ liberty.

Curthoys and Mitchell’s landmark work means that no one will write colonial Australian political history in the same way again. Taking Liberty profoundly changes the story of responsible government by paying attention to the peoples who so clearly lost out in this story of reform. The work places the story of colonial self-government in the context of a wider imperial history while asking searching questions about the limits of democratic inclusion that remain unresolved.