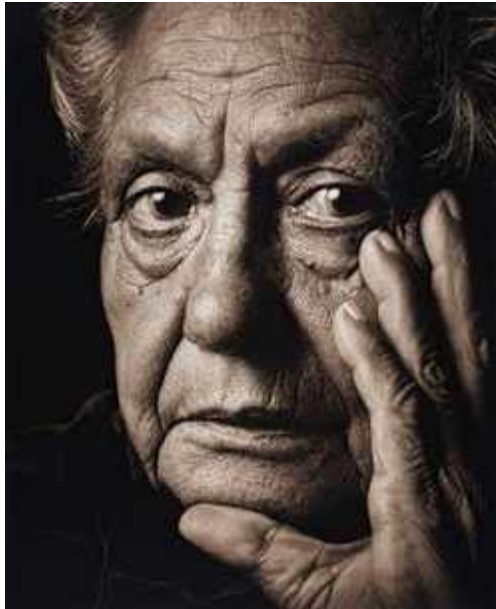


## Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) (1920 - 1993)



Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker). Image courtesy <http://www.qut.edu.au/about/oodgeroo/oodgeroo-noonuccal>

Kath Walker is a very important figure in Queensland history. She was a leading Australian poet, writer, political activist, artist and educator. Kath grew up on North Stradbroke Island; she left school and home at 13 to work as a maid in Brisbane.

During World War Two Kath volunteered to enlist in the Australian Women's Army Service. She had to return to domestic service work to support her young sons when her marriage ended in the 1950s.

Kath had a lifelong commitment to advancing civil rights and improving the lives of her people. She was a leading member of Indigenous organisations that demanded Constitutional change to end state control over Aboriginal people.

This hard fought campaign resulted in the history making 1967 Referendum. Australians voted overwhelmingly to include Aboriginal people in the census and to ensure they were covered by Commonwealth laws.

In the 1950s Kath also became interested in poetry. She joined the Realist Writer's Group where she was encouraged to publish her work. Her first collection, *We Are Going* was released in 1964 selling over 10,000 copies.


Kath later moved back to Stradbroke Island to become an educator, cultural guardian and ambassador for her people. She established the Noonuccal-Nughie Education and Cultural Centre at her home, Moongalba.

In the 1970s Kath travelled across Australia and the world on lecture tours to raise awareness of the ongoing disadvantage experienced by her people.

Kath continued to be a successful writer. She released a series of books for young readers recreating the stories she learned as a young girl, starting with *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972). She saw young people as the hope of the future with thousands visiting the centre at North Stradbroke during the final decades of her life.

In 1987 Kath changed her name to Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal tribe in protest at the Australian Bicentennial celebration. In the same year she returned her MBE to the Queensland Governor stating that Aboriginal Australia had very little to celebrate after 200 years of white settlement.

However, educational and political achievements continued to flow as she was awarded honorary doctorates from Macquarie University (1988), Griffith University



(1989), Monash University (1991), and Queensland University of Technology (1992). In 1990, after the formation of the Australian and Torres Strait Islander Commission, she was elected a member of the Southeast Queensland Regional Council.

Oodgeroo continue to advocate for her people up to her death. She died at her home on Stradbroke Island on 16 September 1993. She will be remembered for her pioneering poetry and her important role in Australian political life.

