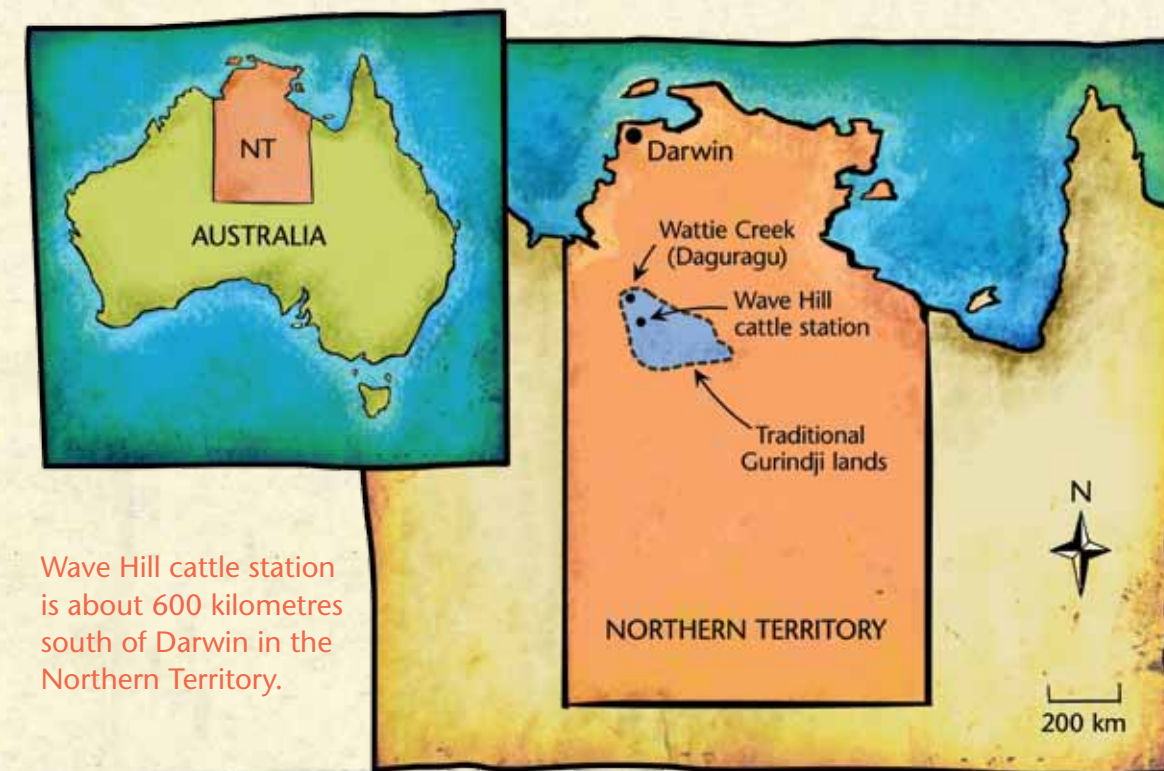


# The big picture

The Gurindji people lived in the Victoria River country in the Northern Territory for thousands of years. In 1883, **Europeans** came and set up Wave Hill cattle station on Gurindji land. The traditional owners had nowhere to live and their hunting grounds were destroyed by the cattle. To survive, they took jobs on cattle stations as house servants and **stockmen**. **Indigenous** workers were treated like slaves. They could not leave the cattle stations and often worked without pay.

In 1914, Wave Hill cattle station was taken over by the Vestey Pastoral Company, owned by English millionaire Lord Vestey. The company made huge profits by paying Indigenous workers flour and beef instead of money. Indigenous families at Wave Hill lived in iron huts with dirt floors and no lights, running water or toilets. There were no schools or health clinics.

Wave Hill cattle station was set up on the traditional lands of the Gurindji people, who had lived there for thousands of years before European settlement.



Wave Hill cattle station is about 600 kilometres south of Darwin in the Northern Territory.

## Eyewitness words

### Billy Bunter Jampijinpa

Billy Bunter Jampijinpa was 16 at the time of the walkout. About living conditions at Wave Hill cattle station, he said:

“We were treated just like dogs... we lived in tin humpies [shelters] you had to crawl in and out on your knees... The food was bad... bits of beef like the head or feet of a bullock. The Vestey mob were hard men. They didn’t care about blackfellas.”

Sydney Morning Herald, 19 August 2006

### Unfair pay

By 1966, the Vestey Pastoral Company had **leased** about 16 000 square kilometres of Northern Territory land and employed more than 30 000 people worldwide. At Wave Hill cattle station, the pay and living conditions for Indigenous workers were terrible. They earned just \$6 a week, while non-Indigenous workers earned \$25 a week for the same work. For working in the manager’s house and gardens, they were paid only \$4 a week. In early 1966, Vincent Lingiari asked Wave Hill cattle station manager Tom Fisher to pay Indigenous stockmen the same as the other workers. Fisher refused.



# What happened next?

## Land rights

Gough Whitlam handed the land back to the Gurindji people in 1975, but he soon lost his position as Prime Minister and a new government was voted in. The new Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, supported the land rights law drawn up by Whitlam's Government. In 1976, the Woodward **Royal Commission** recommended that Australia's **Indigenous peoples** be allowed to control their own lands.

In 1976, the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory)* was passed by the Fraser Government. This meant that some of the Northern Territory's Indigenous peoples could claim ownership of their traditional lands. It also gave Indigenous peoples the right to stop companies mining their land. Under the new law, many of the Northern Territory's Indigenous communities, including the Gurindji and Yolngu people, claimed the rights to their land.

Prime Minister of Australia Gough Whitlam gives Gurindji land back to Vincent Lingiari in 1975



## Gurindji land

The Gurindji applied for ownership of their **leased** land in 1981. Their application was successful and they started their own cattle station. It was the first station in Australia run by Indigenous people. Today, the Gurindji run the Wave Hill cattle station and have re-named the community there Kalkarinji. Each August on **Freedom Day**, they act out the walkout of 1966 that led to the return of their land. Their struggle became so famous that songs were written about them. The most well-known song is 'From Little Things Big Things Grow', written by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody.

## Eyewitness words

Vincent Lingiari knew that getting rights to their land was the key to his people being able to control their own lives. He said:

“Vestey only got cattle, horse but not land. That's mine. Might be Vestey had me one time, but not now.”



In 2006, Billy Bunter Jampijinpa launched the Freedom Day website. Mr Jampijinpa is one of the stockmen who walked off Wave Hill cattle station in 1966.



# What do you think?

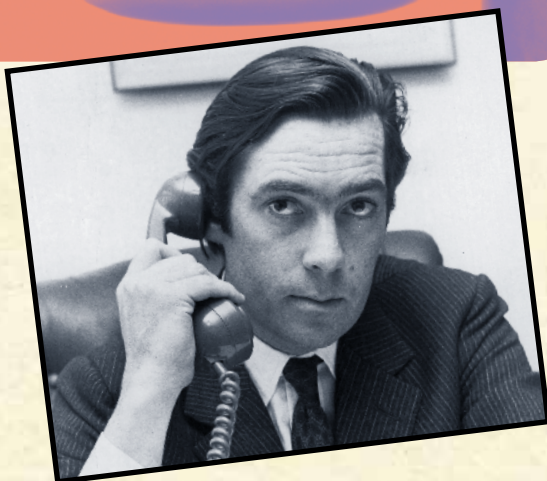
The Wave Hill walkout raises many questions about the law, land ownership and human rights. Try the following activities to test your own ideas about these important subjects.

## Who was right?

During the Wave Hill walkout, both the Vestey and the Gurindji people believed that they were right. Read the following opinions and have a discussion in class about who you think was right.

### The Vestey

The law is clear: if you lease land and pay a yearly rent, you have sole use of it. The Gurindji people disobeyed this law and weakened all land leases.



### The Gurindji

The Gurindji had a right to disobey unfair laws that allowed European cattlemen to steal their land and treat Indigenous workers badly.



## What would you do?

The events outlined on the next page actually occurred at the time of the Wave Hill walkout. Read each scene, then choose what you would do.

### Scene 1

You are Bill Jeffrey, the Aboriginal **Welfare** Officer at Wave Hill. When the Gurindji **stockmen** go on strike, your boss forbids you to give them food. You see that the strikers are hungry. Would you...

- A** tell the strikers to go back to work so that they can be fed
- B** ask your boss in Darwin to change his mind and allow you to give them food
- C** secretly give the strikers some food?

### Scene 2

You are Vincent Lingiari. When you walk off Wave Hill cattle station, you leave some things behind. When you go back for them, they have been stolen. The local police have always sided with the cattle bosses. Would you...

- A** call the police and make a complaint about the theft
- B** speak to Wave Hill cattle station manager Tom Fisher and demand your property back
- C** get some of your men to raid the station and find your property?

### Scene 3

You are Paddy Carroll, boss of the Northern Australian Workers **Union**, which covers the Gurindji stockmen. You are against the stockmen's strike, but your Indigenous co-worker, Dexter Daniels, calls a strike anyway. Would you...

- A** order the strikers to go back to work
- B** have nothing more to do with Dexter Daniels and the strikers
- C** raise money for the strikers and send them food?

Once you have chosen what you would do in each scene, find out what actually happened on page 31.