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THROUGH AMERICAN EYES: A Foreign Correspondent Special

Airs Tuesday June 27

For 25 years Foreign Correspondent has brought the world home to Australians. Now, in a special one-hour collaboration with The New York Times, we flip the camera to get an outsider's take on race relations here.

Race is John Eligon's beat. He roams America reporting for The New York Times on the tensions, eruptions and occasional triumphs in race relations.

What might he make of relations here between Indigenous Australians and the rest of the country?

ABC TV's *Foreign Correspondent* and *The New York Times* decided to find out by sending Eligon on a journey across Australia.

As Eligon quickly learns, less than a lifetime ago indigenous Australians weren't even counted in the Census. For many, "wages" came in rations of flour, sugar and tea. Days and destinies were subject to the whim of bureaucrats and missionaries.

So, having attained full equality under the law, having scored pivotal victories like native title rights, are Indigenous people truly in control of their lives? What more do they need to do for themselves? Is racism these days rare or routine?

John Eligon looks for some answers. In Western Australia's Kimberley region he gets a taste of Indigenous life in a remote town.

There's just a lotta troublemakers here... There's a lotta racism here – Aboriginal girl, 19

There he meets teenagers determined to make something of themselves. But they must rise above frequently unstable home lives and a suicide epidemic that is robbing them of family and friends.

In the same town Eligon follows a good-hearted cop who is trying to stop kids as young as six turning to crime. An elder takes Eligon on a trip to ancestral lands – and dishes out a scorching critique on "the monster" created by wasted mining royalties.

Next stop is idyllic Torres Strait, birthplace of legal trailblazer Eddie Mabo. Indigenous people here have more power than any others thanks to Mabo and a unique fishing treaty with Papua New Guinea.

We're gonna bloody rock your boat and we're gonna sink your ship! – Islander fisherman recounting his ultimatum to white commercial fishermen accused of trespassing

In the Torres Strait John Eligon explores what the pay-off has been for the Islanders and how much autonomy they really have. On a white sand beach Eddie Mabo's daughter Gail shows how her dad

won his famous case – and channels what she thinks he would say about race relations were he alive today.

We have to fight harder to go upstream because the current coming the other way is trying to push us backwards – Gail Mabo

From the tropics Eligon heads to the suburbs – where most Indigenous Australians live. In Brisbane's gritty Inala, he meets a family that appears to defy the racial stereotypes.

University lecturer Chelsea, retired cop Matt and their five kids live in a nice house with a pool. Some 15 years ago Matt made a fateful decision to join the police force. He wanted to change what he saw as its racist culture. That noble effort nearly destroyed him when he fell out with white colleagues over a controversial Aboriginal death in custody.

As Matt and Chelsea learned over time, the signposts of upward mobility can be illusory.

Class does not remedy race – Chelsea

But like many of the Indigenous people Eligon encounters on his journey, the couple is determined to bridge the racial divide. As Chelsea sees it:

I think we're a pretty resilient mob

Through American Eyes – a one-hour Foreign Correspondent special produced by **Suzanne Smith** – airs at the earlier than usual time of 8.30 pm Tuesday June 27 and 10.30am Thursday June 29 on ABC TV, and 6.30 pm Sunday July 2 on ABC TV News. Also on iView.