

NOTES ON ABORIGINES FOR YEAR 10 AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

1788-1990's Concept of **Terra Nullius** - uninhabited land began with the arrival of the first white settlers and continues for some to today

- the noble savage happy in his nothingness
- nomadic
- no settlements - no ownership; no kings - no organisation;

1788-1830's

- massacres (Myall Creek, Gunnedah, NSW, June, 1838, Coniston)
 - random killings,
 - deliberate poisonings,
 - disease (smallpox, tuberculosis, measles, venereal disease, alcoholism)
 - displacement off the land as farmers moved their animals onto the land
 - isolation from the European settlements on reserves (the aborigines of Tasmania herded together and moved to islands in Bass Strait)
- all played their part in the destruction of the traditional lifestyle of the aborigines and their reduction in numbers

1837 establishment of **Protectorates** by the British Government over all native peoples of the British colonies. The "natives" were to be instructed in reading, writing, building houses, making clothes, cultivating the ground and becoming civilised as well as being converted to Christianity. Cultural traditions of the aborigines ignored, destroyed, by the forced movement of people away from their traditional lands and kinship groupings. It was deemed that aborigines had no rights. They were discriminated against in every aspect of their lives whether jobs, pay, education or legal status.

1840's-1900 Reserves established across Australia's inland to keep the aborigines away from European settlements. Still the killings continued on both sides.

1900 -1910 The Immigration Restriction Act (The White Australia Policy) assumed an Australia for white, anglo-celtic Australians, with the Aboriginal population all but removed from the equation.

1910-1920 Aborigines were forbidden to enlist in the war effort - it was actually illegal - but many did so and died and were honoured for doing so although, officially, they never existed. They certainly are not represented by the ANZAC Legend but then, neither are women.

1920-1930 This decade marks the end of small tribal groups of aborigines in inland Australia as settlers forced their way across the whole of central Australia. Massacres continued with the killings on Nulla Nulla Station in 1926 and the Coniston Massacre of 1928 where, despite Royal Commissions of Inquiry no one involved in or responsible for either of these massacres was ever punished for the killings. All the aborigines not already on **reserves or inland missions** were now forced onto them - for their own protection. Half-caste, quadroon (quarter caste) or children with paler skin were removed from the care of their families and forced into jobs and homes, boarding schools

and institutions to be “educated in the ways of the white men”, These children were later to be called the first of **the Stolen Generations**.

1930-1940 In 1937 the Federal Government announced a change in policy to **assimilation** but still the majority of aborigines lived in **special reserves** outside town - Purfleet outside Taree, The Todd River Reserve outside in Alice Springs, Blacktown in Sydney.

In 1938, as white Australians celebrated the 150 years of white settlement of Australia, the aborigines organised a **Day of Mourning and Protest** to express their sadness and distress at the affects white settlement had had on their lives and the lives of their immediate ancestors. In the same year **Albert Namatjira**, a painter from Hermannsburg Mission, held his first major painting exhibition in Melbourne and his art caused a riot by buyers wishing to purchase his works. He was to be granted Australian citizenship in 1957 but his attempts to buy a grazing lease and purchase land in Alice Springs were unsuccessful. He was also put into jail for a period for supplying alcohol to aborigines (his family).

1940-1950 Many aborigines played extremely important roles during World War Two either as militia prepared to defend the northern coastline or as coast watchers equipped with radios and ready and able to send messages to the mainland to warn of Japanese activity around Papua New Guinea and the islands closer to the Australian mainland. Groote Eylandt in the Torres Strait became a particularly important base for warnings about attacks on Darwin.

1950-1960 Kath Walker, a noted Queensland writer and a member of the Noonuccal tribe of Stradbroke Island, began agitating for aboriginal rights.

1960-1970 1961 Kath Walker became active in the Queensland and **Federal Councils for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders**. In 1965 a group of university students led by Charles Perkins (himself an aborigines) conducted a series of highly publicised **Freedom Rides** through northern New South Wales, particularly around the Moree district, where segregation policies meant an aboriginal reserve on the outskirts of town and no access to the medicinal baths in Moree. In 1966 the Gurindji people on **Wave Hill Station** at Wattie Creek in the Northern Territory went on strike for eight years seeking land rights. Their claim was refused but was to be granted to them under the Whitlam Government in the early 1970's. In 1966 Kath Walker established a national publicity campaign to change the constitution so that Aborigines would be given citizenship rights, making them legally Australians, with the right to vote and entitlement to equal pay and government benefits. The result was the **National Referendum of May 1967 where a vote of “yes” to change the constitution and give the Commonwealth power to legislate for the aborigines, abolished constitutional discrimination and finally gave aborigines citizenship rights, meaning that they could vote in elections, expect equal pay and were counted in the census for the first time..** This was part of a wider protest by the Australian community seeking women's equality, an end to racial prejudice and welfare for the needy in society.

1970-1980 26th January, 1972, Aborigines established a **Tent Embassy** on the front lawns of Parliament House in Canberra which remains there today. They demanded land rights and resisted mining on Aboriginal lands. In 1973, under the Whitlam Government, a **Department of Aboriginal Affairs** and a National consultative Council to assist the Minister were established. A policy of self-determination for Aborigines was announced. Other issues under discussion were the granting of land rights, the problem of mining on Aboriginal land (could miners do so? Who owned the mineral rights? Did the companies have to pay the aborigines for the right to mine, or for the minerals themselves?) and the need for legal aid and health programmes for aborigines. A policy of **self-determination** for Aborigines was announced. Aborigines began to seek land rights and government reforms. Under the Woodward Commission an Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Bill was introduced in 1976 whereby existing reserve lands were transferred to three incorporated Aboriginal Land Council (Northern, Central and TIWI) but without the right to veto mining, it being considered in the public interest to continue under Federal control.

1977 Fraser government set up the **National Aboriginal Conference** but it was disbanded in 1985 due to inefficiency.

1980-1990 In 1981 the Pitjantjatjara people of northern South Australia were granted ownership of a huge tract of land in the largest single grant ever made. Aborigines continued to be disadvantaged particularly in health, employment and relationships with the authorities.

On 20th May, 1982 Koiki (Eddie Mabo) and four other Torres Strait Islanders of the Murray Islands, began action for a declaration of native title to their traditional lands. The case was finally settled in 1992.

In March 1983 the Aboriginal Land Rights Act was passed by the NSW Parliament but its provisions were such that it was not received well by aborigines.

Aboriginal Development Commissions were then established to assist in the development of economic independence and self-determination

In 1985 the following statistics were released:

- 12.5% of aborigines did not attend school
- 4.1% of aborigines had any sort of qualifications
- 24.6% of aborigines were unemployed in 1981
- In WA aborigines made up one third of the population and 33% of the prison population
- Across Australia in 1985 the national rate of imprisonment was 67 per 100 000 population. For Aborigines the figure was 800 per 100 000.
- 60% of aborigines under 18 were unemployed

In the same year, under the Hawke government, debate centred on national land rights legislation, essentially, did the aborigines have the right to refuse mining on their land. The mining companies and state government argued that mining brought income to the state and created employment. The Federation of Land Councils said that the aborigines wanted the right to veto mining of their land.

In 1985 the 5000 remaining descendants of the Tasmanian Aborigines began asking museums around the world to return the skulls, skeletons and artefacts from their ancestors for proper burial.

In 1987 a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was established but the results have been somewhat tarnished by their non-acceptance by politicians and public alike.

The celebration of 200 years of white settlement, the bicentenary, in 1988 was boycotted by many aborigines who held their own Day at special places such as Kurnell in southern Sydney where tens of thousands of aborigines gathered from all over Australia and its territories. Other aborigines said we have to live here together we should “try to build a society where one part is not continually hurting and hating the others”.

1990-2000 The Council for Aboriginal **Reconciliation** was established in 1991 to enable the re-education of white Australia to understand where Aborigines are coming from and to allow aborigines themselves to reconcile to the situation they find themselves in.

In 1992 the Mabo case was finally settled when the High Court of Australia found that native title was not extinguished, it continues to exist alongside British common and statute law and that the finding is also applicable to the mainland.

Both these issues continue to be contentious within Australian society.

1993 – 22nd December – the Federal Government passed the Native Title Bill which included

- recognition of existing land rights for all owners of freehold property;
- Necessity that native title claims be supported by proof of continued association with the claimed land
- Provision for claims to be heard by state or federal tribunals
- Financial assistance to claimant

Still did not answer whether native title could exist on land leased to pastoralists

1997 - The Wik Case decided that in Queensland

- Native title continued even on land which the government had leased to pastoralists, and
- Native title rights and the rights of leaseholders existed concurrently, with the leaseholders having the greater right

Prime Minister Howard’s Ten Point Plan

The PM proposed a compromise but it appeared to have mainly negative consequences for people wishing to claim native title. Many people were against it, from politicians to the general public, but it was incorporated into the Native Title Amendment Bill which was passed by both houses of parliament.

SPECIAL DATES IN WHITE/BLACK RELATIONS IN AUSTRALIA –

<http://www.dreamtime.net.au/indigenous/timeline2.cfm> - a wonderfully detailed time line

- 1788-1990's Concept of **Terra Nullius** - uninhabited land
- 1837 establishment of **Protectorates**
- 1840's-1980's **Reserves, Missions and Massacres**
- 1900 -1910 The Immigration Restriction Act (The White Australia Policy)
- 1920-1930 All the aborigines not already on reserves or inland missions were now forced onto them - for their own protection, half caste children removed, the first of the **Stolen Generations (segregation)**
- In 1937 the Federal Government announced a change in policy to **assimilation** but it was not implemented
- In 1938, as white Australians celebrated the 150 years of white settlement of Australia, the aborigines organised a **Day of Mourning and Protest**
- In 1965 a group of university students led by Charles Perkins (himself an aborigine) conducted a series of highly publicised **Freedom Rides** through northern New South Wales
- In 1966 the Gurindji people on Wave Hill Station at Wattie Creek in the Northern Territory went on strike for eight years seeking land rights
- **National Referendum of May 1967** where a vote of "yes" to change the constitution and give the Commonwealth power to legislate for the aborigines, abolished constitutional discrimination and finally gave aborigines citizenship rights, meaning that they could vote in elections, expect equal pay and were counted in the census for the first time..
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- In 1973, under the Whitlam Government, a **Department of Aboriginal Affairs and a National consultative Council** to assist the Minister were established A policy of **self-determination** for Aborigines was announced..
- 1977 Fraser government set up the **National Aboriginal Conference** but it was disbanded in 1985 due to inefficiency. The was the time of the charter of **multiculturalism**
- On 20th May, 1982 Koiki (**Eddie Mabo**) and four other Torres Strait Islanders of the Murray Islands, began action for a declaration of native title to their traditional lands. The case was finally settled in 1992.
- In 1987 a **Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody** was established but the results have been somewhat tarnished by their non-acceptance by politicians and public alike.
- 1989 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) established to administer Aboriginal affairs.
- The **Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation** was established in 1991
- 1992 Mabo Case finally settled
- 1993 Native Title Act established the end of Terra Nullius but it was amended and weakened the original rights
- 1997 The Wik Case settled for Queensland aborigines
- 1997 PM Howard's Ten Point Plan
- 1997 – 25th May, National Sorry Day; 26-28 May Australian Reconciliation Convention
- 2000 – 28th May – People's Walk for Reconciliation Across the Harbour Bridge, Sydney
- 2004 – March, the government proposed the abolition of ATSIC which came into effect 30th June, 2005
- 30th June, 2005 has established an [Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination](#) within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs which now co-ordinates the work of various bodies and departments for aborigines