

# COMMENT

## racism how can white Australians respond?

The current wave of racism across Australia is having widespread effects in the everyday lives of many Australians. Racist abuse in the playgrounds and streets of Australia's cities and increased violence and hostility in rural areas are being reported throughout the country. Many Australians are now having to brace themselves whenever they go out in public. Potential changes to immigration policy and native title threaten to alter Australia's cultural climate and it seems as if each day race relations experience further set backs.

Many Australians have been struggling with how to respond to this wave of racism. In recognition of the urgent need for white Australians to find creative and constructive ways of talking and taking action about racism we have gathered together in this *Comment* a small collection of ideas and information in the hope that they may be found useful. These writings have been produced for and by white Australians in acknowledgement of the privileges that we experience because we are white, the ways in which we are prone to inadvertently reproduce racism, and our collective responsibilities to try to address racist beliefs and practices.

The following pages are not intended to provide answers or solutions but aim instead to generate conversations and to provide encouragement, information and ideas to those who are already trying to respond to racism in their own lives and in the broader culture. If you find the writings useful, we invite you to make lots of copies, to share them with friends and family, to leave copies lying around your workplace, or ask for them to be discussed at your next work meeting.

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**'All in it together'**

## our responsibilities as white Australians

These writings have been created out of numerous conversations with people across Australia who are concerned about the recent wave of racism in this country. The main themes and suggestions that have been talked about have been collected in these pages in the hope that they might offer support to others. One of the major themes that has been discussed is how, as white Australians, we have specific responsibilities to address racism.

Currently across the country there are many conversations occurring about race relations, land rights and immigration. These conversations are taking place at a time of high unemployment and increasing financial worries for many Australians - a context in which divisive politics can thrive. Racism is a divisive force. How can we ensure that the ways in which we respond to racism enable us to engage constructively with the issues and with each other?

In trying to talk about issues of racism, powerful and complex feelings are often evoked. As white Australians, we can feel a very urgent need to speak out about racism but then the conversations which follow can often degenerate into argument and the taking of sides. Many of us have long histories within our own families and our communities of struggling with these issues and ways to talk about them. How can we as white Australians respond to racism in ways which do not lead to further antagonism or hostility and instead open possibilities for meaningful conversations and action?

### What it means to be white

Many of the conversations that were shared in the process of putting these writings together expressed how in times of hardship it can be difficult to acknowledge the ways in which we are privileged - especially if other white Australians seem not to be recognising our hardship. However, it was overwhelmingly agreed that as white Australians we **all** experience privileges because we are white. In addition to this it was felt that we experience the following privileges, and others, whether we wish to or not.

- ◆ Our children are less likely to be taunted or to experience racist violence at school.
- ◆ We are less likely to be subjected to prejudice or racist violence and abuse.
- ◆ We are less likely to experience discrimination in everyday life, such as when applying for a house to rent or standing in a queue at the supermarket.

In thinking about racism, it is the more obvious examples of discrimination or abuse which quickly come to mind. However, in putting together these writings, many people said that the more they explore what racism is, the more they are beginning to see it as something that is a part of our everyday lives and language. The ways in which we view history, language, what we believe is 'normal', and what we choose to know or not to know about other peoples' experiences can all be areas in which we unknowingly reproduce racism.

People have articulated how they have found it helpful to think of racism - not as an individual attribute - but as a 'system' or 'a way of thinking and acting' which we have lived and breathed during our whole lives. Being raised as a white person in a country with histories based on racist beliefs and actions means that the knowledge we learned at school and ways of speaking passed down through generations often result in us reproducing racism in ways which we don't even notice. In trying to come to terms with the effects of these 'systems' or 'structures' of racism, some people spoke of the appropriateness of the old slogan 'if you're not actively a part of the solution of racism then you are a part of the problem.'

### All in it together

In summary, the two main themes that came from the conversations in preparing these writings were that as white Australians we all experience privileges because we are white, and we are all prone to inadvertently reproducing racism. This means that we are all in it together - that as white Australians we have a collective responsibility to try to address racism. We may not be able to be non-racist but by seeking to be anti-racist, in trying to notice racist ways of thinking, we can open possibilities for conversations and action. Another way of putting this is that we may not have created the problem, it may not be our individual fault that racism exists, but we have a responsibility to 'break the chain' of racism.

### The effects of how we respond to racism

In acknowledging the importance for individuals to speak out against racism, how can we at the same time remain aware of the real effects of the ways in which we speak out and the actions we take? Ways of responding which make us 'feel good' by distancing ourselves from overtly racist beliefs may not be experienced as particularly helpful by those people who are feeling the full effects of racism. Similarly, ways of responding to racism by white Australians which lead to increased polarisation and conflict between white people may actually make things worse for those people who are the direct targets of racism. How can we remain aware of the effects of the ways in which we speak and the ways we take action in relation to racism? And how we can act and speak in ways that increase the chances of constructive engagement with other white people?

The following pages include news of creative work on issues of racism which is occurring around the country. It explores our responsibilities to be thoughtful about how we respond to both public and private conversations about racism so that we reduce the possibility that our responses will be inflaming of anger or hostility and improve the chances of engaging constructively with other white Australians. It also includes information about native title and immigration for, as white Australians, it would seem we have a responsibility to inform ourselves of the issues currently being discussed.

# *invitations to white Australia*

## **to respond**

Basil Varghese  
Education Coordinator, Brotherhood of St Laurence  
Melbourne, Victoria.

*As an Indian Australian, I have been saddened to witness the ways in which the recent conversations in the public arena have given permission for bigotry in the playgrounds and streets of everyday Australia. We have received reports, and I have witnessed first hand, Chinese Australians being spat upon and assaulted. I have also heard of increased racial conflict in our schools. Indigenous Australians, especially in rural areas, are experiencing increased vilification. There are real consequences for people's lives when bigoted and racist sentiments are expressed in the public arena.*

*I believe we have responsibilities to respond, to point out the inaccuracies in current discussions about land rights and immigration. We need to clarify what is fact and what is fiction. We need to use humour and laughter as well. And importantly, we need to take care to ensure that the ways in which we respond do not in any way inflame division or hatred.*

*Indigenous Australians only became citizens of this country and achieved the vote in 1967. The White Australia Policy only ceased to be official policy in 1973. Now, less than thirty years later, it seems to be a point in Australia's history where we have to stand up for what we believe in. If we believe that Australia ought to be a democratic, inclusive society then now is the time for us to respond.*

## **to lift the spirits**

Jack Beetson  
Executive Officer, Tranby College  
Redfern, NSW

*It would certainly lift the spirits of Aboriginal people to see white people taking action. Aboriginal people at the moment are absolutely devastated. The recent public statements are a clear indication to Aboriginal people that we are living in very racist times. This is the biggest issue to confront Australia in a long time. If we don't fix it now, we're going to go down a path of extreme right-wing policies. Race relations in this country have probably already been put back fifty years.*

*I believe that addressing racism is in the interests of all of us, not just in the interests of Aboriginal people. It is in the interests of non-Aboriginal Australia as well. We are all enhanced by the cultural diversity in this country.*

*I think that the goodwill that existed and was clearly demonstrated in the 1967 referendum by and large still exists. But what people need to do is really make that clear now. They need to come out openly and show that goodwill to Aboriginal people still exists. It would certainly lift the spirits of Aboriginal Australia.*

## **to speak out and to remember**

Zita Antonios, Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner  
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Sydney, NSW.

*When racism is allowed to go unchecked it hurts people. It hurts the individual who is the target of racist action. It hurts their family and friends and it also hurts the community, our society as a whole. It creates division and bitterness and we have enough examples in history, and currently overseas, to know what can happen when people begin to focus on hate and division. I think we need to talk about how racism hurts.*

*When people speak of how racism is damaging Australia's trade relations and foreign affairs they are right to worry. But who is talking about the effects that the recent wave of racism is having on our fellow Australians? Who is talking about the effects on the Vietnamese-Australian girl who is now terrified to go to school and has started to have night terrors? Who is talking about the children who are now dreading the lunch-hour bell? Who is talking about the Australian-Filipino bride whose children no longer want her to leave the house because they are embarrassed of the ways in which people are looking at her? I've recently had people tell me that they've lived in Australia for forty years and that they've never felt as different as they do now. For many Australians, to go out in public is now becoming very difficult and painful. I'm getting calls everyday in which parents are saying, 'my child is feeling too scared to go to school, they are scared of being in public.' When it gets to the stage where our children don't feel safe to go to school, where citizens fear to go on the streets, surely it is time for all Australians to take action.*

*We all have to shoulder some responsibility regardless of our background. We have to talk to our children. We have to not let the racist talk on the radio go unchallenged. It is very easy to sit back and say nothing. But what is it they say? All that it takes for evil to flourish is for good people to do nothing. It is everyone's responsibility. We have to remember that as people we share far more than we have differences between us. We all have red blood and salty tears.*

# good news

*Around the country people have been trying to respond to the recent wave of racism in creative and non-violent ways. The following selection of work which is underway is by no means comprehensive. It represents the information we were able to collect over a limited amount of time and is included simply to encourage our imaginations!*

## **Orange Ribbon Campaign**

Sydney/National - 'I live in Redfern in inner Sydney and just love living within a multicultural environment. I am always in the habit of engaging with people in the street - making eye contact and smiling. However, when racist sentiments began to be expressed in the public arena late last year I began to notice that the dynamics on the streets where I live were changing. There was no more eye contact. I wasn't connecting with people anymore. Asian Australians in particular were looking down as I passed them. I was standing at a bus stop, waiting for a bus, and I looked at the people around me who were from every culture you could imagine and I felt, as a white Australian, very implicated. How could they know that I don't agree with racist views? How could they know that I love everything about multiculturalism? How could I find a way to reconnect?

I knew I had to do something although I'm not one to usually go out and demonstrate. So I talked with a friend at work and we started the Orange Ribbon Campaign - wearing a orange ribbon we thought could be a simple symbol to show that you support multiculturalism. I wrote a letter to Philip Adams and he picked it up and publicised it. We bought the ribbons and pins and started to send them out to people on our work mailing list. We travelled up to Parliament House, we contacted women's networks and we began to hear of people taking it up in all sorts of places. Community Aid Abroad for example adopted it as part of their national Walk Against Want Campaign. We are soon to develop an Orange Ribbon Brooch which will be more permanent - like the HIV/AIDS Red Ribbon brooch. The enthusiasm is still growing.' Susan Leith-Miller. *Susan and the Orange Ribbon Campaign can be contacted c/o PO Box 336 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012. Ph: 0419 499 087.*

## **Kumarangk Coalition and the Long Blockade**

Adelaide - The Kumarangk Coalition is an Adelaide-based group whose members are drawn from a number of community, church, non-government and union organisations. The Coalition has come together to support the protection of Aboriginal heritage, the environment and improvement of planning processes, all of which continue to be threatened by the building of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge.

The Kumarangk Coalition recently received the Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation's State Award for a community project, for organising the Long Walk in which hundreds of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people walked from Adelaide to Goolwa in a journey for peace, knowledge and understanding in support of the Ngarrindjeri people's struggle to stop the Bridge.

The Coalition is now collecting names of people who are pledging to travel to Goolwa to participate in a non-violent 'Long Blockade' if construction work on the Hindmarsh Island bridge begins. Hundreds of Australians who uphold the custodial role of Ngarrindjeri elders for the Lower Murray area will sign a pledge to support the Long Blockade.

The Kumarangk Coalition also expects that people will come from interstate to show that not all non-indigenous people are insensitive or hostile to fundamental heritage values of Aboriginal Australians.

*For further information about the Long Blockade contact:  
The KUMARANGK Coalition,  
120 Wakefield St. Adelaide,  
South Australia 5000.  
<http://www.foe.on.net/kumarangk/>*

## **Towards Reconciliation**

National - Across the country many people are playing their part in considering what reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia would mean and how it could come about. From the 26-28th of May the Australian Reconciliation Council will host the Australian Reconciliation Convention, an event that aims to set the agenda for reconciliation into the future. The event is timed to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum which brought Australians together in support of Indigenous Australians' rights. Its theme is: - 'Renewal of the Nation' through building better relationships between indigenous peoples and the wider community to fulfil the Council's vision of: A united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all. (*The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's national contact number is 008 807 071*)

In the last few months meetings have been held around Australia to discuss the key issues of reconciliation, to invite widespread involvement, and to facilitate the spreading of ideas and practical examples of meaningful reconciliation. For example, a public meeting about Women and Reconciliation on the 24th March, was hosted by women of the Sophia Justice Circle, at the Sophia Centre, an Adelaide-based Christian feminist spirituality centre. Katrina Power, Chairperson of Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute and the keynote speaker at the meeting, said 'The Indigenous women present were deeply moved by the capacity for genuine love and empathy expressed by non-Indigenous women. When non-Indigenous women eagerly learn about Indigenous women's struggle, and take action to support them, they demonstrate real reconciliation.' *Sophia Centre: 225 Cross Rd. Cumberland Park. SA 5041.*

## ***Electoral protest***

**Brisbane** - The Queensland Chinese Community Voice was formed by concerned members of the Australian-Chinese community who were tired of feeling helpless about what they could do to respond to current climate of racism. They sought legal advice and have subsequently lodged an objection with the Australian Electoral Commission against the registration of the One Nation Party, claiming that the party's policies violate the Racial Discrimination Act. *For more information contact Queensland Chinese Community Voice. GPO Box 1600 Brisbane 4001.*

## ***Working across cultures***

**Melbourne** - Community organisations which are trying to develop respectful ways of working across cultures may be interested in the work of the Cultural Equity **Unit** of WestCASA in Footscray, Victoria. Although the work of the Cultural Equity **Unit** is still in its early stages, much has already been learned and the **Unit** is keen to share their experiences with those who are interested. *Contact Sarah Chambers or Alberta Miculan at WestCASA. PO Box 443 Footscray 3011. (ph) 03 9687 8637. (fx) 03 9687 8960.*

## ***Respect Campaign***

**Perth** - The South West Group (Western Australia) of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) has launched a 'Respect Campaign' in response to the discord that is growing in the Australian community over race and immigration. The group has published a statement which expresses dismay at the tone of the current debate and calls on politicians and other community leaders to provide leadership on the issue. The AASW believes that it is time that an alternative tolerant voice is heard.

As Imelda Dodds, National President of the AASW describes: 'There are individuals who have been calling for simplistic solutions to very complex problems. It is understandable that we feel anxious about the rapidity of change, particularly when jobs and lifestyles are threatened, but Australians need to find solutions together. Labelling and blaming particular groups for the nation's difficulties undermines the process of national collaborative problem solving.'

The AASW encourages interested people to obtain copies of the statement, 'A Message to all Australians', from the National Office of AASW (*Tel: (06) 273 0199; Fax (06) 273 5020*). The Association requests that people return their copies to the address on the statement and the Association will undertake to publicise the names and the statement in the near future.

## ***Vietnam voices***

**Sydney** - The Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in the western suburbs of Sydney recently mounted an art-show and held a conference entitled Vietnam Voices - Reassessment and Reconciliation. The art show is open until June and consists of photos, posters and memorabilia from, and reflecting on, the Vietnam War (or the American War, as many Vietnamese call it). The conference, held 3-4 May, brought together three of the groups whose lives were affected by the war - veterans, Vietnamese people and those who protested Australia's involvement. For two days these different voices listened to each other. Some of the voices were reconciled with the past; some were not. It was essentially an exercise in listening to different people's stories. Sometimes, the power of the recounting had everyone holding their breath. There were tears and laughter. Touching each other's lives. Again. But differently this time. No guns, no violence. Just Australians talking with each other. Opening new possibilities. *For people interested in exploring issues of reconciliation in relation to the war in Vietnam please contact Biff Ward on (06) 257 1773.*

## ***Celebrating Diversity***

**Adelaide** - The Celebrating Diversity Coalition was initiated in Adelaide in November 1996 in order to plan a rally which was held in early December. A wide range of people whose lives have been touched in some way by the issue of racism have come together to celebrate the cultural diversity that is in this country and to speak out about racial intolerance and injustice. The group has formed a number of task groups which focus on media and promotion, quick response actions, workplace education, young people, and planning events. The Coalition would welcome new members and will be launched officially in July. *Contact Scott Litchfield : (ph) 08 8 2124066.*

## ***Support for native title***

**Sydney** - A 'prominent citizen's statement on native title' was launched on the 1st of May at the Harold Park Hotel. The endorsers - more than 100 artists, sportspeople, religious leader, politicians, writers, academics and others - are appealing 'to all Australian politicians to endorse publicly and unequivocally the High Court's native title decisions as just and correct.' The statement supports the 'legitimate rights' of Aboriginal people, and expresses the need for negotiations to make co-existence of native title and pastoral leases workable. Signatories include actors Geoffrey Rush, Judy Davis, Ruth Cracknell and Rachel Ward; authors Peter Carey, Tom Keneally and Elizabeth Jolly; playwright David Williamson; cartoonist Bruce Petty; film directors Jane Campion, Scott Hicks, Baz Luhrman and George Miller; and sportspeople Des Hasler and Gary Ella. The statement will be sent to all federal and state government leaders. *To add your signature, fax the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education on (02) 9810 3033 or phone (02) 9810 3922, (02) 9552 3599 (a/h).*

## ***In Brief***

Around the country many other events have been taking place. Rock Against Racism concerts have recently been held in Newcastle, Brisbane and Perth. Film nights, discussions, public meetings, rallies, multicultural festivals and anti-racism poster runs are continuing in most capital cities. Members of church groups, welfare organisations, universities and members of the public are continuing to write letters to papers and to contribute to radio talk-back programs.

## ***Playback Theatre***

**Adelaide** - Playback Theatre feels it is time for artists in our community to stand up and celebrate our diversity. They are planning *A Night to Respond*, where 'as a community we can voice our opposition to racism in a humorous, meaningful, lively, entertaining way.' It is to be held on Saturday, June 28th, 8:00pm and the venue is Tandanya. Ring Janette (08) 8271 8134 or Liz (08) 8362 9351.

*If you are thinking of distributing this publication to others it might be a good idea to collect information about local groups and events and include them on an extra sheet of paper.*

## What would we need to do to create constructive conversations about racism?

The recent wave of racism and the need to respond has brought out into the open significant differences within families, between friends and in workplaces. This has led to many conversations about issues of racism. Many of us have examples of times and contexts where it has been impossible for us to find ways to make these conversations constructive. Just about the only thing that seems clear is that there are no easy answers on how to create constructive conversations about racism. And yet this seems an important area to explore.

- ◆ How can we respond to racist views and practices in ways that make it clear that we reject these views and practices while at the same time avoiding blaming individuals for what are collective issues and responsibilities?
- ◆ How can we show our commitment to anti-racist action without adopting an attitude of self-righteousness or showing hostility to other white people?
- ◆ How can we find respectful ways to talk with other white people about racism which don't lead to increased alienation from each other?
- ◆ How can we find ways to talk with other white people about racism which keep the conversation potentially always open?
- ◆ In what circumstances, after what time and effort, is it appropriate to leave certain conversations alone and to put energy on the issue of racism into other areas?

### Taking care of conversations

In preparing these writings, many people spoke of the difficulties they had recently experienced in talking about racism. Listed below are some of the things that they had found most helpful:

- ◆ Some people spoke of the usefulness of asking questions rather than getting into arguments or debates.
- ◆ Some people have found it useful to try to invite conversations that involve a mutual exploration of how each person has come to think in the ways that they do.
- ◆ Other people spoke of the importance of acknowledging the ways in which they had at times been captivated by racist ideas or practices and using this as a starting point for discussion.
- ◆ Some people spoke of how naming and acknowledging the fear of being seen as racist can open space for more honest discussions.
- ◆ Discussing racism as a 'system' outside the person has been helpful for some.
- ◆ Speaking of 'what racism tells us' or 'what racism teaches us' was seen by others to make it easier to have discussions that avoided arguments about whether or not certain individuals were racist.

People felt that remaining aware of the effects of our conversations and creating contexts in which to speak about these dilemmas were good starting points

### Creative interruptions

When conversations about issues of racism become argumentative it can be frustrating and painful. This can be especially true when these sorts of conversations occur with friends, family or workmates.

If we find ourselves participating in a conversation with another white person about racism that is becoming more divisive and antagonistic are there ways in which we can interrupt to try to keep the conversation and relationship creative? A number of people mentioned how useful it would be to create contexts in which we could talk about creative ways of interrupting conversations that are becoming divisive.

### Everyday interactions

The recent increase in public racism is having effects on our everyday interactions. As white Australians, because of the changes in the broader context, everyday interactions with Asian Australians and Indigenous Australians can now take on different meanings. This is creating new dilemmas and questions. The following situation is a good example: *'I was sitting in the back seat of a taxi which was being driven by a Chinese-Australian and a commentator on the radio began to describe a recent racist public meeting in ways that I felt very uncomfortable about. I couldn't work out what was an appropriate response.'*

*I have always felt that raising issues of racism with people of colour that I don't know in this sort of everyday interaction is inappropriate as it could be experienced as intrusive or patronising. But I couldn't help but wonder - has the change in the political climate now brought different responsibilities? Do we as white Australians now need to clearly articulate where we stand as a preliminary to other conversations?*

The 'Orange Ribbon' campaign described earlier, was created as a response to these sorts of tensions. If we were to create contexts to talk through these sorts of dilemmas perhaps it would lead to other creative responses.

### Working together

In recognising that the recent wave of racism is having widespread effects many people spoke of the importance of finding ways of constructively working together. There seem to be a number of restraints to overcome as white people in order to work together on issues of racism. What would it take for all people working on issues of racism to encourage and support each other's efforts in ways that build momentum?

- \* While not silencing other issues of power, for example class, gender and sexuality, how can we keep in mind that we are on the same path?
- \* How can we resist the paralysis that can be generated from the fear of getting things wrong?
- \* How can we find ways of working that enable everyone to contribute whatever resources they have to offer?

### Keeping on track

In our attempts to respond to the racist statements or actions of others it can be easy to lose sight of the ways in which we ourselves may be inadvertently reproducing racist beliefs or practices. How can we create contexts for conversations and processes of accountability with those most affected by racism to assist us to keep on track?

# Towards understanding the Wik decision and Native Title

*The following pages include information about Mabo and the Wik decision in the hope of demystifying the current debate about native title and encouraging further investigation.*

The **Mabo Case** rejected the belief that Australia was terra nullius (land belonging to no one) at the time of European settlement. It stated that Aboriginal pre-existing rights to land survived colonisation and still survive today in certain circumstances. The Mabo Case essentially referred to 'vacant Crown Land' - land that is the property of the Australian Government and that has no other tenure on it. The Mabo decision assumed that if there is no other tenure then the original Aboriginal and Islander tenure (or native title rights) have survived. In order to make successful native title claims however, Aboriginal people must have continuously maintained their traditional association with the particular land claimed. The Mabo decision also stated that native title has been extinguished on all freehold land and the vast majority of leasehold land.

The **Wik Case** deals with the land in Australia that is held under pastoral leases. This represents a large area, something close to 42% of the continent. Pastoral leases are a very special form of tenure and this is essentially what the High Court acknowledged in the Wik case. As Henry Reynolds, Professor of History and Politics at James Cook University, explains:

*'Pastoral leases were created between about 1847 and 1850 by the Colonial Office in Britain specifically in order to allow pastoralists and Aboriginal people mutual rights to the land. The Colonial Office was facing the problems created by the squatting rush in the 1830's and 40's as squatters were taking up vast areas of land in the interior. The British Government wanted to ensure that the land didn't pass into the hands of the individual squatters and equally, at the time, they were very concerned about the fate of Aboriginal people.*

*They concluded that if the pastoralists were allowed to drive the Aboriginal people off the pastoral leases over this enormous area of land that the Aboriginal people would be destroyed, that they would be exterminated. This was the way they phrased it in their own internal memos to one another. So what the Colonial Office decided to do was to create a form of tenure which would give the pastoralists some sort of security, some certainty to run their stock, but which didn't give them freehold.*

*Pastoral leases were therefore quite specifically created not to exclude Aboriginal people. It was a system of land tenure that allowed for joint usage, for dual, mutual rights. The pastoralists were given only the rights to pasture cattle and possibly to grow some crops in a small area. And the Aboriginal people were to continue to have their traditional rights - to live on the land and conduct their normal way of life. Pastoral leases allow pastoralists to run their pastoral industry while at the same time honouring other people's rights as well.*

*are timber rights that don't belong to the pastoralists, there are quarrying rights that don't belong to the pastoralist. It is a form of tenure which sees many competing interests over the same land. It falls far short of freehold and as a consequence the pastoralists only pay a small amount of money. They sometimes only pay a few hundred dollars for huge areas of land - as an annual rental.'* (personal communication, May 1997)

The High Court's Wik decision acknowledged that pastoral leases allow for mutual rights between pastoralists and Aboriginal people, and other relevant parties. Therefore pastoral leases do not extinguish native title rights. However the High Court also stated that where there is a conflict of interest between pastoralists and Aboriginal people that the interests of pastoralists over-ride those of Aboriginal people. (see A Plain English Guide to the Wik Case, prepared by ATSIC March 1997)

## A turning point in our history

### An interview with Professor Henry Reynolds

Professor in History and Politics, James Cook University QLD  
Books include: The Other Side of the Frontier  
(Penguin, Ringwood 1982) and  
Dispossession (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989)

*I think we are at a turning point in Australian history. The High Court has taken Australia up to the cross roads and said 'okay now you need to make a decision'. The current debate about the Wik decision is really about whether Australia can turn its back on its colonial heritage. There is nothing more typical in Australia's colonial settlement than the dispossession of Aboriginal people on the great range lands. This was the scene of the greatest bloodshed. Maybe ten to fifteen thousand people were killed to effect the settlement of these areas. Most of the labour that made this land productive was Aboriginal labour - usually unpaid. It is a crucial aspect of Australia's history. To then be told that the frontier era wasn't decisive, that the destruction of all Aboriginal interests on the land was not completed by the squatting rush and the subsequent activities of government, means that we have to revisit old questions. Are we going to essentially accept the decision which the British Colonial Office made in the late 1840's that these lands had to be shared with mutual rights? Or are we going to, in effect, put the clock back to what was happening before that decision. I don't think Australia can be the same whichever decision is taken. It is going to be of absolutely critical importance in determining the Australia of the next century.*

*The situation now is that the Prime Minister is stuck in the middle and says that he wants to get a balance between the interests of pastoralists and the interests of Aboriginal people. What is being suggested is to strike a balance between people who want to protect their property rights which have been recognised by the High Court and which go right back to the time prior to European settlement, and therefore into time immemorial, and those who say it should be taken away.*

*Miners have rights, often travellers have rights, there*

*It's like trying to strike a balance between the house owner and the burglar. If you strike a balance between the house owner and the burglar the houseowner is going to suffer. If the government does diminish the rights of Aboriginal people in relation to pastoral leases it will be argued very strongly that this is affecting the property interests of a particular racial group and therefore is contrary to the Race Discrimination Act and should be struck down. It will also cause enormous international problems for the government. There is no country in the world as far as I know, even in the third world, where a blanket extinguishment of the rights of indigenous people would even be considered. Certainly there are governments who are taking away the rights of particular peoples in rainforest areas they want to log or perhaps the most common case of such conflict is over the establishment of hydro-electric projects where the damming of river valleys floods the land of indigenous peoples. Such conflicts over specific pieces of land are going on in many parts of the world. But I don't think any government would seriously think of extinguishment on the vast scale that the Australian Government is considering. Neither Brazil, nor Mexico nor anywhere would consider taking the sort of heavy hand that is being suggested by the National Farmers Federation and the National Party.*

*The attack on the Wik decision by the farming interests, the pastoralists and the National Party has been extraordinary. We keep hearing that it is the pastoralist's land but it's not. It is Crown Land, that is to say the land of the Australian people, over which pastoralists have certain rights to run sheep and cattle. Pastoralists have never had exclusive rights to the land. They are only tenants of the Crown. No government - imperial, colonial or state - has ever felt over the last 150 years that it is desirable to give freehold title on these vast range lands. To turn around now and suggest that this should happen and that it should happen at no cost to the pastoralists, and that any compensation should be paid by the government, seems to me an outrageous proposition.*

*I think the tide is beginning to turn. People are beginning to realise what a pastoral lease was, that these people have never owned the land, that they only pay a small amount of money, and that a relatively small number of people are going to be affected - it's not the farmers of Australia at all, it's only a few thousand pastoralists at most. People are beginning to learn that in most of the country there's always been a clause within pastoral leases that provides for mutual usage that is still active and has been there since the middle of last century. The general public is beginning to learn that many pastoral leases are held by large pastoral companies, extremely wealthy Australians and absentee landowners including the sultan of Brunei. I think the debate is starting to swing around as people begin to understand more about it.*

*The High Court of Australia has now said that if there are Aboriginal people who still maintain contact with land under pastoral leases that they also have some rights. But they are rights over Crown Land and the actual ownership of that land resides with the people of Australia. What some members of the National Party have been suggesting is that the National Party give the land of the people to a handful of pastoralists. It's not their land to give away.*

## Towards understanding immigration

The recent public debates about immigration have proved more confusing than clarifying. The use of statistics is often fraught with difficulty and always value-laden. The following facts and figures have been included in the hope that they provide background information and to encourage readers to investigate further. [Statistics cited below are from Face the Facts: Some Questions and Answers about Immigration, Refugees and Indigenous Affairs - produced by the Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner 1997]

Over the last two hundred and nine years wave upon wave of immigration has created the country that we now call Australia. Prior to 1788 the inhabitants of this land were Indigenous peoples - Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders. All non-Indigenous Australians are, by definition, immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. Now, people from over 160 different countries live within Australia making up a truly multi-cultural country.

Multiculturalism is a policy endorsed by the Australian Government. It replaced the previous official policy of assimilation. Multiculturalism seeks to recognise the rights of all Australians to enjoy their cultural heritage (including language and religion) and the right to equal treatment and opportunities for everyone regardless of their backgrounds. In a poll conducted on April 18-20th 1997, commissioned by the Weekend Australian, 78% of those surveyed stated that they believed that multiculturalism had been good for Australia. (Weekend Australian, p.12, May 3-4, 1997) The following pages contain information about current immigration to Australia.

### Australia's migrant population

At the 30th June 1995, twenty-three percent of the Australian population was born overseas. Seven percent were born in the United Kingdom and Ireland, 6.4% were born in Europe, 4.8% in Asia, 2.1% in Oceania, 1.2% were born in the Middle East and Africa and less than 2% in other regions.

Most settlers in 1995-6 came from New Zealand (12.4%), the United Kingdom (11.4%) and China (11.3%). In the previous financial year the major source countries were the United Kingdom, New Zealand and countries of the former Yugoslavia.

### What are the current levels of immigration?

The migrant intake changes annually. Levels of immigration have been lower in the last five years than most of the levels recorded since WWII. The number of migrants who arrived in Australia in 1995-6 was 82,500. (This fell from the 1991-2 figure which was 98,900.)

It is important to note that analysis of the extent of immigration usually only focuses on the numbers of people arriving in Australia and the numbers emigrating are sometimes ignored. In 1994-95, for example, over 25, 000 people left the country permanently.

## What is the breakdown of categories in the migration program?

The 1996-97 migration program provides:

- \* 44,700 places for family migrants sponsored by family members already in Australia
- \* 28,000 for skilled migrants who gain entry because of their work skills
- \* 1,300 for special eligibility migrants

## Change in policy from the past - from unskilled to skilled migrants

In the past fifty years, the focus of immigration was on bringing unskilled workers to Australia to assist the expansion of the manufacturing industry. Other migrants came with skills but their qualifications were generally not recognised. Thus, many had no option but to work in unskilled or semi-skilled positions.

More recently, over half the migrants from non-English speaking countries have arrived in Australia with post-school qualifications. Nearly 18% of migrants who came to Australia during the period 1981-90 held a tertiary degree. Overall, 11.8% (11.4% of English speaking and 12.1% non-English speaking) of migrants have a tertiary degree compared with 8.5% of those born here. Recognition and acceptance of overseas qualifications remains a problem for many migrants.

## What are the current economic effects of immigration to Australia?

Most of the research in the area of the effects of immigration on Australia has been about the economic effects of immigration. Research has shown that immigration stimulates the economy through:

- \* increased tax revenue
- \* contribution of funds from overseas
- \* participation in employment
- \* spending on housing
- \* increased consumption of goods and services

Business migrants inject significant funds into the Australian economy. They are expected to transfer \$856 million to Australia in 1996-97. Research indicates that immigration enhances Australia's export possibilities and is also likely to increase exports through tourism.

## Immigration and employment

In short, according to available research, migrants create at least as many jobs as they take. There is no evidence to show that immigration causes higher unemployment in the longer term. Although rates of unemployment for recent arrivals are higher than for those people who have been in Australia for some time (for reasons including unfamiliarity with the labour market, lack of contacts, language difficulties, lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and racial discrimination), research indicates that these rates do not have a significant impact on the overall unemployment rate. The rates of unemployment for recent arrivals drop dramatically as length of residency increases.

Research into Australia's last three recessions shows that migrants are less reliant on social security than people born in Australia. During 1990-94 migrants were less likely than those born in Australia to be receiving either the Job Search Allowance or the Newstart Allowance.

It is relevant to note that people of non-English speaking background have less access to training and promotional opportunities, that the process for the recognition of overseas qualifications is often slow and difficult and that this results in 34.8% of non-English speaking background migrants being over-educated for their jobs and underpaid for their skill level, compared with 11.6% of Australian born workers.

## Refugees and entrants under Australia's Humanitarian Program

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on Refugees, Australia has committed itself to the fundamental principle underlying the Convention - namely, that all participating countries have an obligation not to return people to places where they will face human rights violations.

In 1996-97, the planned intake under Australia's Humanitarian Program is 12,000 people. The majority of refugees arrive through one of Australia's resettlement schemes. This means that they have already spent several months or even years in a refugee camp in a country of first asylum. Australia also considers applications for protection through the refugee process from people already in Australia.

Detention is mandatory for all unauthorised arrivals and the process of application can take a long time. People applying for refugee status can remain in detention for months and sometimes years while awaiting finalisation of their claims. At present, the majority of humanitarian entrants come from the Middle East, Europe and the former USSR. Priority is being given to those from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, the Middle East and Africa.

**In order for us as Australians to make informed decisions about the future of our immigration policy it seems important that we have the relevant information. For more information please refer to *Face the Facts: Some Questions and Answers about Immigration, Refugees and Indigenous Affairs*. Produced by the Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner 1997.**

**It is available from Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) National Office. GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001. Phone: 1800 021199.**

# Resources

## Frontier- Stories from white Australia's forgotten war

Shown on ABC TV earlier this year, *Frontier* is now available as a three part video series which documents Australia's hundred and fifty year land war. Between 1788 and 1938, thousands of settlers and tens of thousands of Aboriginal people were killed in racial violence across the continent. Produced by ABC TV Documentaries in 1997 and researched by Marcia Langton and Henry Reynolds, *Frontier* comprehensively debunks myths and in a powerfully moving way invites us as contemporary Australians to come to terms with our history. For anyone interested in reconciliation or understanding current debates around native title and land rights *Frontier* would prove invaluable viewing. *Enquiries: ABC TV Program Sales, GPO Box 9994 (in your capital city). Alternatively you could encourage your local library to buy copies as they are expensive!*

## Admission Impossible

The very first Act passed by the first Federal Parliament of Australia in 1901 was an act that was to become known as the 'White Australia Policy'. It was designed to restrict the entry to Australia of people of colour, Asians and any other people whose race offended. *Admission Impossible* (produced by Film Australia in 1992) traces the history of the 'White Australia Policy'. It begins by mentioning briefly the violence of the initial European invasion and the racist violence that Chinese immigrants in the 1800's faced on the Australian gold fields and then focuses on the act itself and its effects. From 1901 to 1972 the White Australia Policy dominated Australia's approach to immigration. It was enforced in two ways. Those people who were already in Australia who the policy deemed to be of 'unacceptable racial background' were to be deported. And only those with white skin were to be allowed to immigrate.

*Admission Impossible* depicts the forced deportations that occurred because of the passing of the White Australia Policy including those of Kanak labourers in Northern Queensland as well as deportations, after WWII, of Chinese refugees. These refugees, who had played an important part in Australia's war effort by filling labour shortages, are shown fearfully being forced to board grossly overcrowded ships that were also holding Japanese war-time internees and prisoners of war. Throughout the 1950's and 60's Asian Australians and others targeted because of the White Australia policy continued to be deported. *Admission Impossible*, through interviews with former immigration officials, describes how whenever the government wished to deport a Chinese or other Asian national they applied what became known as the 'dictation test'. The 'White Australia Policy' allowed for the exclusion of any immigrant who failed to be able to write down a fifty word dictation test given by the immigration official. The official could choose to apply the test in any language that he or she might choose. Not surprisingly, whenever a dictation test was demanded a deportation was almost always the result.

In order to enforce the White Australia Policy during immigration procedures, all applicants for immigration were forced to undergo medical examinations in which doctors checked for 'traces of Orientalism'. Any sign of colour, or tell-tale shapes of the eyes resulted in failed applications. *Admission Impossible* describes that even after WWII, when Australia agreed to accept war-time refugees from Germany, immigration officials were dispatched with instructions to select only 'Nordic' types. Out of 170,000 displaced persons that were accepted into Australia after 1947 only 500 were Jewish. Australian Immigration officials in Europe according to *Admission Impossible*, used a form up until the mid 1950's which required that applicants state whether or not they were Jewish. Furthermore this form required Immigration Officials to ask applicants whether any member of their family was 'not of pure Aryan descent.'

Immigration procedures for those migrating from European countries became more flexible after WWII. The White Australia Policy, however, remained in existence until 1972 when the Whitlam Government came to power. Only twenty-five years ago it was still enshrined in legislation that only people of white skin could immigrate to Australia. *Admission Impossible* is a powerful documentary that puts the ongoing calls to reduce Asian immigration into a sobering historical perspective. At the same time it clearly demonstrates that today's multicultural Australia is a different country than the Australia of twenty-five years ago. Keeping alive our histories may be one way to ensure that the process of change continues. *Contact Film Australia about availability or encourage your local library to stock it.*

## Towards culturally appropriate services

'Reclaiming Our Stories, Reclaiming Our Lives' (Dulwich Centre Newsletter No.1 1995) describes a project initiated by the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia as a response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. It contains ideas and suggestions as to how to work towards providing culturally appropriate services to Indigenous Australians. Copies are available from Dulwich Centre Publications, Hutt St PO Box 7192. Adelaide. South Australia 5000. (ph) 08 82233 966 (fx) 08 8232 4441.

## Face the Facts

The Race Discrimination Unit of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) in Sydney, has produced a booklet entitled 'Face the Facts: Some Questions and Answers about Immigration, Refugees and Indigenous Affairs.' The booklet addresses many of the myths that have recently surfaced in the 'race debate'. Also available are booklets on 'Understanding Racism in Australia' and the Wik decision. *Copies are available c/o HREOC in most states - ring the Sydney office on 1800 021 199 (toll free) for information.* HREOC are also the appropriate organisation to ring if you have any enquiries regarding the application of the Racial Discrimination Act and Racial Vilification legislation.

## Towards reconciliation

The Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (AYPAC) is the peak national youth affairs organisation in Australia and is based in Canberra. In 1995, after the release of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, AYPAC decided that non-Indigenous organisations and individuals must take responsibility for the impact of Australia's legal and justice systems on Indigenous people. Since then AYPAC has been in the process of developing a resource to assist non-indigenous community organisations play their part in reconciliation. Its working title is 'The National Youth Sector Reconciliation Compact' and it will be available in June. The compact includes a six point plan which describes in detail the steps that non-Indigenous organisations can take in order to get involved in meaningful ways with the reconciliation process. The package also includes an extensive resource list and supporting statements from prominent Australians. It is hoped that community organisations will commit themselves to the process of reconciliation by formally signing the compact and presenting it to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. *For more information contact Julian Pocock, Executive Officer, AYPAC, (ph)06 247 1666. (fx) 06 247 1799. PO Box 204, Ainslie ACT 2602.*

**Reconciliation study kits** are still available from The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in order to assist people to set up their own Study Circles to learn more about the issues of reconciliation. *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, National: 1800 807 071.*

<i>ACT:</i>	<i>1800 804 330 / NSW:</i>	<i>1800 060 266</i>
<i>NT:</i>	<i>1800 060 268 / QLD:</i>	<i>1800 060 267</i>
<i>SA:</i>	<i>1800 060 270 / TAS:</i>	<i>1800 659 363</i>
<i>VIC:</i>	<i>1800 060 265 / WA:</i>	<i>1800 060 269</i>

## The Challenging Racism Game

The Challenging Racism Game is a simulation game which aims to assist non-Aboriginal people to explore structural racism. The game was designed by a group developing alternative Bicentenary activities during 1987-88 and was evaluated by Aboriginal community groups in Adelaide, Victoria and New South Wales during 1987, before the game was documented and released widely. The response from Aboriginal groups has continued to be extremely positive. The game is structured to allow non-Aboriginal participants to explore the nature of racism and how racism works. It aims to highlight structural inequalities and oppression experienced by Aboriginal people and to provide a creative and stimulating context in which to explore racism in Australia. The whole process takes two hours. No less than 12 and no more than 25 people can be involved. At least one Aboriginal observer, who's time is being paid, and an experienced non-Aboriginal facilitator of the game are required. *Contact: Claire Ralfs or Suzy Stiles on 08 8443 9081 (AH) or Claire Ralfs 08 8234 5219.*

## The Color of Fear

The Color of Fear (Stir-Fry Productions 1991, California ) is an engaging passionate film of a group of North American men from different cultural backgrounds talking about racism and white privilege. By exploring the effects of racism on a personal, daily level, the film invites viewers to do the same in their lives. The Color of Fear particularly invites white viewers to consider what it means to be white, how our lives have been influenced by racism and how we benefit from white privilege. Powerful challenges are made to the white men in the film. The compassion and vulnerability that the men show each other - in the face of something as divisive as racism - offers hope and a sense of possibility. *The people listed below have a copy of the Color of Fear available for loan.*

## Interested in further conversations?

The following people have agreed to act as contact people in their cities to facilitate networks and further conversations about the sorts of issues raised in this publication. Each contact person has agreed to facilitate a small informal get together in the hope of creating a small local supportive network. It is planned that the focus of each network will remain at the local community level. The networks will try to offer thoughtful conversation and to support the thinking and action that people are taking in their own lives.

*Brisbane: Mark Trudinger (ph) 07 3846 2427*

*Sydney: Loretta Perry (ph) 019 985 094*

*Adelaide: Maggie Carey & Shona Russell (ph) 08 8202 5190*

*Melbourne: Sarah Chambers & Alberta Miculan (ph) 03 9687 8637*

*Canberra: Bridie Doyle & Christine Ohrin (ph) 247 8071*

## a handful of stories - add your own!!

*'In my workplace I have found it easy to photocopy publications and leave copies in the staff room and on people's desks. Asking for a particular publication to be discussed at our next meeting has also been a non-threatening way of raising issues and getting people to start to talk to one another about difficult issues.'*

*'In order to avoid the hostility that often accompanies protests and rallies we've found that it really helps to pick our venue carefully. When trying to respond to a racist event it has made a big difference whenever we have held our alternative event away from and out of sight of the racist event. We've found that holding an event at the same time and trying to attract good numbers through publicity and by ensuring that the entertainment or speeches are of a very high standard has left us feeling great at the end of the day. It's also delivered a powerful message that there are people who think differently and act differently without generating hostility.'*

*'I think it would be really good to develop an organised system to respond to talk back radio. If you heard something on the radio which really needed to be responded to you could ring one person who would ring another etc. Then you could all try to ring in to respond. You'd know that if you did get to speak that supportive people would be listening. And you could debrief afterwards.'*

*'I found it empowering to call a meeting of my friends where we arranged a 'responding to racism phone tree' that we said we would activate if a public racist event took place. I think it is really important to be very specific about what sort of event will be responded to and exactly what the response will be. We decided that we would respond upon hearing of a racist event with a non-violent, candle-lit vigil lasting for one hour, with particularly pre-chosen songs. We didn't want speeches or chanting. We even preplanned the location. I reckon starting small and only preparing for small, sustainable action is what works best. Then it can build its own momentum.'*

*'The most powerful events I've taken part in around issues of racism have involved the sharing of personal experiences. To create respectful contexts where white Australians can hear of the stories and experiences of migrants, of refugees for example can dispel myths in powerful ways.'*

*'In working on issues of racism I think its important to remember that we are working against a form of oppression that has very long histories. We need to understand the actions that we are taking in ways that don't set us up for failure. We need to keep a long term perspective. Even if we don't see changes now the actions that we are taking will be building foundations for future change.'*

**About this publication:** This publication has been created by Dulwich Centre Publication through a collaborative process involving many different people including: Claire Ralfs, Biff Ward, Margaret Chua, Basil Varghese, David Denborough, Shona Russell, Cheryl White, Chris McLean, Carol Molenaar, Jane Hales, Cherice Ogilvie, Linda Higgins, Hannah McDougall, Michael White Suzanne Elliott, Mark Trudinger, Mark D'Astoli, Jussey Harbord, Maggie Carey, Reihana Mohideen, Jen Linden, Julie Hoare, Scott Litchfield, Turana (?), Bruce Powell, Cathy Piccone, Suzy Styles, Peter Curran, Ben Wadham, Margaret?

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