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Australian History and Society: An Introduction 1788–2000

Section 1:
1788–1850

Fakultät für
**Kultur- und
Sozialwissen-
schaften**

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Preface

This introductory course traces some of the major social, political and economic influences in the development of the Australian nation and society from 1788 to the present. The movement from British convict outpost to self-governing colonies of the British Empire to nationhood will be illustrated with a focus on themes such as: European discovery, invasion and settlement of Australia; the impact of mass immigration; the nature and impact of Australia's rural industries and mineral wealth; urbanisation and national identity; the development of social reform movements; the political and social consequences of Australia's involvement in war; and public and government responses to asylum seekers, Native Title and national apologies.

The course also recognises the re-orientation in Australian historical discourse: where historians previously wrote of 'settlement', many now write of 'occupation' or 'invasion'; rather than drawing on British ancestry, today Australians refer to a myriad of cultural backgrounds. Since the 1970s, approaches to Australian history have attempted to reinterpret the past to feature issues that had hitherto overlooked – the shift in interpretation demanded by groups who were previously marginalised by the Eurocentric and celebratory nature of traditional approaches to Australian history is recognised. For example, the participation of women in Australia's history and the inclusion of Aboriginal historical issues is now standard practice. The rejection of the concept of *Terra Nullius* and acknowledgement of prior ownership of the land by Aboriginal people has forced a fundamental reinterpretation of Australia's past.

Acknowledgement of the contribution of marginalised groups to Australia's historical record – commonly referred to as 'addressing silences' – raises issues about power and powerlessness and demonstrates how categories of analysis such as class, race and gender flow through broader themes of social relations, resistance and reconciliation. This course will examine the relationship between a variety of groups – Indigenous, transported, settler and Australian born – who made up Australian society in the past. Using immigration as an umbrella, this course highlights circumstances that have cut the path towards a multicultural society at different stages of Australia's development. The transformation from a mono-cultural to a *multi-cultural* society can only occur once historical injustices have been acknowledged and there is commitment to lessening the effects of discrimination, misunderstanding and ignorance throughout the Australian community.

Now in the second decade of the new millennium, Australia consolidates over 100 years of nationhood. Learning about Australian history is a process of continual re-examination of the sources as new perspectives emerge. Furthermore, conflicting hypotheses demonstrate that Australian history is alive and subject to considerable and passionate historiographical debate. This course provides only a starting point from which students might be inspired to look elsewhere for more detailed evidence about the issues and events that interest them. We hope you find the course useful and interesting, and that you are encouraged to look elsewhere for more detailed evidence about topics of interest to you.

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