**PROTECTIONISM**

Although the 'frontier' period of Australian history can be viewed in the terms of war, there were also many white settlers who were appalled at the treatment of the Indigenous people and wanted to help them. Some of those who tried to help were government officials, others were Christian missionaries. These people truly believed that the Aboriginal people needed their help and without it they would die out. Their somewhat misguided attempts to help the Indigenous people are known as 'paternalism'. Paternalism means looking after someone and taking care of their interests because they cannot do it themselves. Instead of hunting down Aboriginal people and murdering them, government policy changed to treat them as if they were children who had to be protected.

Charles Darwin's theories on evolution and survival of the fittest were wholly accepted by the settlers. They believed that Aboriginal people were weaker and inferior because of the colour of their skin. They judged the Aboriginal peoples by their own European standards and decided that they were primitive and uncultured. They refused to recognise or understand that the Indigenous people had a highly-developed culture and a traditional way of life that was just different from theirs. They saw it as their duty, as the superior, white race, to protect what was left of the Aboriginal peoples before they died out.

They became convinced that the 'black races' had to die out, and so they thought they could make that process better for Aboriginal people by placing them on government reserves or in church missions where they could die in peace. This new approach to Aboriginal affairs was known as 'Protection' policy. Unfortunately like many other initiatives to help Indigenous people, the protection policy did not protect their freedoms or their way of life - it only helped to further destroy them. See image 2

From the time they first arrived in Australia the white settlers had attempted to 'civilise' the Indigenous people. Making them wear clothes and attend church was only the start of it. The Native Institute was set up in 1814 by Governor Macquarie to educate Aboriginal people in the European way. Like Governor Phillip had tried with Bennelong and Colebee over 30 years before, Macquarie believed that if you educated some of the Indigenous population then they would take back what they had learned to their community. The Native Institute was never very popular with Indigenous people and was closed down by the 1830s.

An early example of protection policies and how they were misguided is the fate of the Indigenous Tasmanians. By the 1820s the effect of the frontier war in Tasmania had been devastating on the Indigenous population of the island. The local officials came up with the plan of confining the surviving Aboriginal people to islands off the coast, both for their own protection and to make it easier for the white settlers. Aboriginal people were convinced to move onto the islands off the Tasmanian coast by a well-meaning young Methodist preacher called George Robinson. Robinson believed that the Aboriginal people would die out unless they moved and he convinced them of this. By 1847 the remnants of a number of Tasmanian Aboriginal groups were living on Flinders Island north of Tasmania. Their numbers totalled only just over 200. Robinson truly believed that he was doing the right thing by them, but far from living a free, traditional way of life, the Indigenous Tasmanian people were now living under guard, forced to wear clothes and learn Christianity. By 1847 all but 47 of them had died from disease and despair. The last of them, a woman named Truganini, died in 1869. Genocide (the killing of an entire race of people) had taken place in Tasmania at first because of the frontier war, but also as a result of the new protection policies. See animation

In the 1830s, the British government said that more had to be done to protect the Aboriginal people from the white settlers. In 1838 four 'protectorates' were set up in Victoria to prevent any further mistreatment of Aboriginal people in the Port Philip area (near modern-day Melbourne). George Robinson and four other men were made 'protectors' and were given the very large sum of 20 000 pounds to spend on learning more about Aboriginal people. The protectorates set aside land for Indigenous people to stay on to be safe from white aggression, but they were not very successful in the long term. The scheme was eventually abandoned a few years later when the plans to educate and civilise the Aboriginal people had not worked. The scheme never received much support from the white settlers, either. They resented the money that was spent on the protectorates and they also resented that good farming land was given over to Aboriginal people.

As with many other of these paternal schemes to 'improve' the lives of Indigenous people, the instigators of the idea did not take into account the fact that Aboriginal people saw nothing wrong with their way of life. They had lived in complete harmony with the land for thousands of years. The only reason they were struggling now was because of the white settlers stealing their land.

After the failure of the protectorates, the next government initiative to 'protect' the Aboriginal people was the establishment of reserves. A reserve was an area of land set aside for Aboriginal people to live on. The first reserves were set up outside Sydney in 1816 as areas where Aboriginal people could farm land and grow their own food. But as the white farmers began to move into the area, Aboriginal people were moved off it and pushed onto land that was not as good. In the 1850s, the idea of reserves was adopted by the colony's governors as a way of easing the suffering of Aboriginal people. By this time disease and the frontier war had so decimated the Indigenous population of Australia that it was believed Aboriginal people were dying out. The reserves were seen as places for them to die in peace and comfort.

The reality was that the Indigenous population did not die out, it began to grow again. On the reserves they were now safe from attacks by white settlers, but this safety came at the price of independence. Although Aboriginal people did initially have some freedom of movement in the reserves, their traditional way of life was eroded as they became more and more dependant on white handouts just to survive. In the past they would have been able to move on to allow the food supplies in an area to regenerate. That was no longer possible. As the traditional way of life died out, Indigenous people were relying on white flour rations, rather than finding their own food.

In 1883 the Aboriginal Protection Board was set up to protect Aboriginal people and manage the reserves. Its main job was to hand out the food and clothing rations to the reserves, but the board eventually came to control the lives of all the Aboriginal people in New South Wales. Under the board's authority, thousands of people were moved from their homelands and put into reserves which were on land that had no spiritual connection for them. By 1894 there were over 114 reserves in New South Wales alone.

Like the reserves the church missions were established for the protection of Aboriginal people, but the missions also wanted to educate them on the 'Christian' way of life. The missions were run by many different churches, but they all had the same goal - to help turn Aboriginal people away from their 'pagan' way of life, towards Christianity. Like many of the people who wished to protect Aboriginal people, their attempts were well meaning, they truly believed that they were doing the right thing for the 'primitive natives'. What it meant for Aboriginal people was that they were denied the right to use their traditional names and languages on the Christian missions. In many cases their children were removed from them. The missionaries saw it as their duty to help Aboriginal people, but in trying to help they only hurt them more.

For many Aboriginal people who were starving and living in extreme hardship, they had no choice but to move on to a government reserve or into a church mission. By the end of the 19th century their way of life and their lands had been so destroyed by white settlement that they were now dependant on the government and the churches for their survival.

When soldiers began returning after the First World War, the government started giving away reserve land to the soldiers and their families to set up home. When the reserves closed, Aboriginal people could not go back to living off the land and they were forced into the towns and cities. As they were not wanted there by the white people, they became 'fringe dwellers', forced to live on the outskirts of the towns and cities.

**ASSIMILATION**

The idea of assimilation had been around since the 1930s but was not adopted as an official government policy towards the Aboriginal peoples until the 1950s. It became official government policy in Australia not just for Aboriginal peoples, but for all foreign migrants as well. In the late 1940s, Australia was still a very 'British' country, 97 per cent of the population was Australian, or British-born. The National Anthem 'God Save The Queen' was still sung after films in the cinema. Anyone who came to Australia from abroad was expected to fit in with this culture - they were expected to assimilate. Aboriginal peoples and migrants were expected to give up their own heritage and adopt the culture of the majority.

Many people were scared of new cultures coming into Australia and diluting the 'Australian' culture. Since the early 1900s there had been a 'White Australia' policy when it came to immigration. Only white people from Europe (and preferably Britain or Ireland) were allowed to immigrate. People from elsewhere, especially Asia, found it incredibly difficult to move permanently to Australia. When people did migrate to Australia they were expected to leave their old way of life behind. *See image 1*

The same mindset was applied to the Indigenous population. Since the first white settlers had arrived in 1788 they had tried to impose their own values, customs and beliefs onto the Aboriginal peoples. When they were forced onto reserves from the 1850s onwards, their traditional way of life was eroded even further. They were not allowed to have Aboriginal names or continue their traditional customs. Then in the mid-20th century, as many were forced off the reserves and into towns and cities, they were expected to leave their beliefs and traditions behind them. The Aboriginal Protection Board said they had to develop from 'their former primitive state to the standards of the white man'.

In 1951 the Federal Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, actively pursued the policy of assimilation in reference to Aboriginal people as a way of improving their way of life. He, like many others before him, believed that they could improve their treatment and conditions, if they could be encouraged to be more 'white'. Assimilation for Aboriginal people was seen as a positive policy by many people - as were the policies of paternalism and protectionism. They 'were only trying to help'. *See animation*

Between 1911 and 1930 almost half of the reserve land in New South Wales was taken for white people. The Aboriginal people had been promised they could stay on that land forever, but it was taken away. And as assimilation became a key policy for the government, more and more Aboriginal people were forced off the reserves and into the towns and cities. Many Aboriginal people wanted to move to cities and find work - to get away from the control of the reserve manager or the local authority. But when they arrived in the cities they came up against racism and discrimination. Instead of being assimilated into 'white' society, they were shunned and ignored and were forced to live on the fringes of society in poverty and unemployment. In many rural areas segregation became widespread. Aboriginal people were barred from the hotels and bars, they could only use swimming pools at certain times and sit in certain places in cinemas.

Another aspect of the assimilation policy was the lack of right to citizenship. The Indigenous peoples of Australia were not recognised as citizens under the constitution until a referendum in 1967. Before the 1940s, Aboriginal people could not become citizens, but after the Second World War they could be counted as citizens if they applied for a certificate. By having a certificate, however, they had to give up all ties with theIndigenous community, including their families. In New South Wales it was known as an 'exemption' certificate; it exempted someone from being a person of Aboriginal descent. To be able to vote, to be able to move around with no restrictions, to be able to buy alcohol; basically to be able to make any sort of decision about their lives, Aboriginal people had to deny their heritage and their families. The government saw citizenship as a lure to make Aboriginal people assimilate. They promoted the certificates as a good thing and encouraged those who were 'civilised' enough to apply for them. Understandably these exemption certificates were looked upon with contempt by the majority of Aboriginal people who compared them to dog licences. 14 000 eligible Aboriginal people lived in New South Wales at the time, only 1500 certificates were ever issued.

In 1953 the Northern Territory Welfare Ordinance makes Aboriginal people wards of the government.

In 1961 the Native Welfare Conference defined assimilation as;

'All Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians'.

Only four years later that definition had to be changed because it was clear that level of assimilation was not happening. There was not a 'single Australian community', nor was there likely to be. At the 1965 Native Welfare Conference, assimilation was re-defined as;

'The policy of Assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community.'

The assimilation policy did not work - Aboriginal people did not want to lose their traditional way of life or become white and British. The white community did not want to accept Aboriginal people into their society - racism was rife in Australia. Many people still thought like the early settlers - Aboriginal people were from an inferior race that was bound to die out. Assimilation was another government policy that was presented as being 'for the good' of the Indigenous people, but became just another way of destroying Aboriginal culture.

It has become obvious with hindsight that the logic behind assimilation was contradictory. Aboriginal people were always being told they had to be more 'white' but they were never given the freedom to change. They were told they had to take responsibility for assimilating into society, but they had never been given the opportunity to assume responsibility for anything - many of them had spent their entire lives being controlled by a reserve manager or a missionary. When some Aboriginal people did try to assimilate they were told they were not 'ready' yet to enter white society. Assimilation never gave Aboriginal people the same rights as other Australians, even though they were supposed to act like them.

**INTEGRATION**

By 1964 it became clear that assimilation was not working as it should. The rise of an Indigenous protest movement in the 1960s meant that more people were aware of the discrimination that was being perpetrated against the Indigenous population. In an era of liberalisation, assimilation no longer seemed to be the 'right' policy to pursue. Instead many people came to see 'integration' as a better way to move forward. When it became clear that the foreign migrants were able to keep aspects of their cultures alive while still living within Australian society, the Federal Government was more open to letting Aboriginal people integrate rather than assimilate. They were still expected to adapt to and adopt 'white' Australian culture, but they were given more leeway to practice traditional aspects of what was left of their own culture. The Australian government did not actively try to create a multicultural society until the 1970s, when policy towards the Indigenous population changed once more to self-determination.

The most tragic aspect of the assimilation policy was that it led to many children being taken away from their parents and families and placed in foster care or groups homes - they have become known as the 'Stolen Generations'.

**SELF DETERMINATION**

While the land rights campaign took off and the referendum was being held the assimilation and integration policies were slowly dying out. They had been shown not to work and in the new political and social climate of Australia in the early 1970s they were no longer seen as justifiable policies. Self-determination became the new 'buzz' word surrounding Aboriginal issues. The age of paternalism finally came to an end and a new attitude to Indigenous rights was adopted by successive federal governments with the introduction of self-determination. See image 1

Self-determination meant that aborigines would now have more say in their affairs and more input into the laws and policies that affected their community. They would also have more freedom to live their lives how they wanted to. The assimilation policy of taking children away from Aboriginal parents was also officially ended. Self-determination was a major step towards Aboriginal people having the same rights and freedoms as those enjoyed by white Australians.

There are two main reasons why self-determination became the fore front of government policy. The new Federal Labor government under E.G. (Gough) Whitlam was instituting a major period of change in Australia and the major influx of refugees from South East Asia in the early part of the 1970s meant that assimilation as a policy was no longer feasible.

The Whitlam government recognised that a multicultural society was much more achievable and beneficial for Australia. As with the new migrants, the government now realised all groups and cultures should be treated equally. A white, homogenous (all the same) society was no longer as desirable as it had been after the Second World War. Instead of trying to destroy Aboriginal culture, the Federal government encouraged people to accept it. Schools began teaching Aboriginal culture and history to both Indigenous and white children.  See image 2

In the 1970s the land rights issue continued, but now the Commonwealth government was seriously looking into the issue of land ownership. The effect of mining and other commercial projects on traditional Aboriginal land was also investigated. Although the Commonwealth government did not encourage the states to investigate the land rights issue, it did put a stop on mining companies applying for mining permits on Aboriginal reserve land that it owned.