

# Multiculturalism in australia essay



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What is multiculturalism as a descriptor of Australia's population and settlement policy? How has it changed before, during, and after the Howard government? In practice, is life in Australia more integrationist or more multicultural?

Australia is a melting pot of races, cultures and beliefs. This country was built by people from rich variety of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. The lives of Australians have changed greatly along with the active policy of immigration since 1945 (Brett 2003). Today we can clearly see many different cultures get together to call Australia home and most of the cultures have embraced the Australian way of life. This essay will firstly give a brief description of Australian immigration history along with earlier policies and the phase of multiculturalism that was dominant for several decades as well as look at government practices and changes in immigration policies before during and after Howard government.

Multiculturalism refers to several different cultures which can be brought together to live peacefully and equally as one. The history of human habitation with the Australia begins with the first arrival of peoples families to the present native inhabitants. It is believed that the Australia's foremost indigenous tribes arrived over 50, 000 years ago from an unknown region of Asia (Brett 2003). European exploration of Australia began in 1606 when a Spanish navigator sailed through the Torres Strait, which separates Australia from Papua New Guinea. He was soon followed by Dutch, French and English explorers who began to map the continent (Brett 2003).

Australia was generally depicted as a distant and unattractive territory for European settlement but for Great Britain it had deliberate and socio economic value. The British Control of the continent offered a solution for the relocation of convicts in its overpowered prisons and also assists as a base for British naval. Therefore the British settlement of Australia began in 1788 and afterwards the colony began to develop rapidly as free settlers arrived from Britain and Ireland and new lands were opened up for farming (Carter 2006, p. 341).

However, with the discovery of gold in 1851, the nature of Australian migration changed completely. This gold rush era cause an early migration boom and started the international arrivals, People arrived in far greater numbers and from more varied backgrounds than ever before. Between the period of 1851 and 1861 over 600, 000 people migrated to Australia (Hodge 2006, p. 91).

When the colonies federated in 1901, control of immigration changed. The first legislation passed by the new parliament was the immigration restriction act which was also referred to as the ‘ White Australian Policy’. In spite of relatively large amount of Chinese residents in Australia this act ensured those who were not of European descent were not permitted to live in Australia and also banned Asian migration for the next fifty years (www. Australiatodayhistoryofimmigration. htm) That same year the Federal Parliament passed the Pacific Islands Labourers Act to exclude their employment as contract labourers and to deport those already in the country. During this period Australia had many unfair immigration laws which

were conflicting and could not be met by those who were not of European descent (Horne 1980).

In 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War, migration almost ceased. Furthermore, some migrants from countries such as Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey previously thought acceptable were now reclassified as ‘enemy aliens’ and prohibit people from these countries for five years (Hodge 2006, p. 91). As with the end of First World War Church and community organisations such as the YMCA and the Salvation Army sponsored migrants. Small numbers also arrived independently. As the United States sought to limit migration of Southern Europeans, increasing numbers of young men from Greece and Italy paid their own way to Australia. By the 1930s, Jewish settlers began arriving in greater numbers, many of them refugees from Hitler’s Europe (www. ads. gov. au).

Before World War two, Australia was a country with a homogenous European population and remained in this manner for some time. However during the Second World War, Australia became home to many non-European refugees, especially to Asian countries. Malaysian’s, Filipino’s and Indonesian are settled down in the country. Australia actively required these immigrants, with the government assisting many of them, they found work due to an expanding economy and major infrastructure projects such as ‘Snowy Mountain scheme’. There were workers from over thirty different nations who were not necessarily of European descent. Seventy percent of the workers who were part of the scheme were migrants who saw potential in coming to Australia (www. Australiatodayhistoryofimmigration. htm).

Harold Holt's decision in 1949 to permit approximately 800 non-European refugees and the Japanese war brides to be admitted was the first movement for Australia to become a multicultural society. When the war ended, Australia launched a massive entirely new immigration programme Australia negotiated agreements with other governments and international organisations to help achieve high migration targets (Lopez 2000, p. 131)

Former Australian Prime Minister John Curtin's dream of keeping Australia in the hands of its white European descendants did not last. From the 1950s, Australia began to relax its 'White Australia' policy. In 1956 non-European residents were allowed to apply for citizenship (Hodge 2006, p. 91). Two years later the transcription Test was abolished as a further means of exclusion. By the 1960s mixed race migration was becoming easier and in 1966 Australia entered into its first migration agreement with non-European countries. This was a big step for Australia as it was the first time that both the political government and the Australian people agreed on letting different cultures mix around together (Brett 2003).

Then in 1972 Australians elected their first Labour government since 1948. As Minister for Immigration, Al Grassby radically changed official policy. The quota system, based on country of origin and preservation of racial 'homogeneity', was replaced by 'structured selection.' Migrants were chosen on the basis of skills and capital, rather than the country of origin, selecting those most likely to integrate easily and become self sufficient. In 1973, the White Australian Policy was formally discarded and declared Australia as a 'multicultural' society, Al Grassby announced that every relic of past ethnic or racial discrimination had been abolished (Lopez 2000, p. 131).

Multiculturalism policy has been reoriented from a focus on settler groups to the broader constituency of all Australians with the mission of promoting harmonious community relations and building social cohesion in a way that inhibits and prevents racism (Probert 2001)

In 1988 the Fitzgerald Inquiry led to further changes in migration with a move away from ‘family reunion’ towards an emphasis on skilled and business categories. The assisted passage scheme had ended in 1981 and only refugees are given any level of support on their arrival in Australia. Tiananmen Square Massacre incident was occurred in 1989 and the Prime Minister Bob Hawke granted permanent residency to many Chinese students in Australia. After the Jakarta riots of May 1998 migrants from Jakarta trickled in to major cities in Australia (Hodge 2006, p. 91).

Although the multiculturalism was adopted by the government and accepted by majority of the Australians still there were some conflicts regarding the multiculturalism during that period. Political harmony on multiculturalism was shattered when John Howard, leader of the opposition, took a different approach on multiculturalism. Howard was a staunch believer in traditional Australian values. In 1988 Howard pushed for a number of policy changes: one was for an adjustment of the mix of migrants; another was for a ‘One-Australia’ post-arrival. Stating that he believed the rate of Asian immigration into Australia should be slowed down for the sake of social cohesion. He stated: “I do believe that if it is – in the eyes of some in the community – that it’s too great, it would be in our immediate-term interest and supporting of social cohesion if it were slowed down a little, so the capacity of the community to absorb it was greater”(Richards 2003).

However the Hawke Labour Government of that time was in support of multiculturalism, they created the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet whose objectives included raising awareness of cultural diversity and promoting social cohesion, understanding and tolerance. Even though Howard broke the harmony of the major parties over multiculturalism, Hawke Labour government remained committed to the policy and the Labour party's platform professed the goal of ' Working Together for a Multicultural Australian' (Probert 2001).

Howard Government was elected in 1996 As Prime Minister; John Howard pointedly avoided using the ' M' word, multiculturalism. He insisted it not be used in the joint parliamentary resolution rejecting racism that was passed in 1996, and avoided it in speeches that nevertheless courted the ethnic constituency (Betts 2000) The Howard government effectively marginalised multiculturalism as an issue by keeping some of its paraphernalia while emphasising common political values and national unity.

There was some scaling down of immigration, Australia accepted 87, 000 immigrants in 1994-95 and planned immigrant intake was reduced to 68, 000 in the beginning of Howard Government (www. ads. gov. au).

Howard's distaste for multiculturalism was long-standing but motivated as much by political expediency as personal taste, but a decade later his strong commitment to traditional Australian values was condensed. Prime Minister Howard finally accepted ' Australian multiculturalism'-with strong emphasis on Australian-at least sufficiently to launch the National Multiculturalism Advisory Council's report Australian multiculturalism for a new century:

Towards inclusiveness in April 1999. That report, however, was a rather innocuous and somewhat garbled version of multiculturalism as Australian values and citizenship (Betts 2000). Australia has a 'pluralist democracy', the report affirmed, and 'Australian multiculturalism has been built on the evolving values of Australian democracy and "citizenship"'. Diversity was recognised as a fact rather than as an end in itself, and valued as 'a great cultural, social and economic resource'. The report claimed that 'Australian multiculturalism' had 'at its core ...the same values that are embedded in the notion of "citizenship", including tolerance and a commitment to freedom and equal opportunity'. Even John Howard's old favourites, mateship and a fair go, were incorporated in the revamped version ([www.ads.gov.au](http://www.ads.gov.au)).

Multiculturalism is now used more by governments at the national and state levels as rhetoric of community relations that aims at social cohesion. The Council for Multicultural Australia, was established in July 2000, and charged with implementing A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia. Its purpose is to promote the benefits of diversity to business and to oversee the implementation of a charter of public service in a culturally diverse society (Probert 2001). In May 2003 the Howard government released its multicultural policy statement, Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity. It updated the 1999 new agenda, set strategic directions for 2003-06, and included a commitment to a Council for Multicultural Australia (Brett 2003).

In 2004-05, Australia accepted 123, 000 new settlers, a 40 per cent increase over the past 10 years. The largest number of immigrants (40, 000 in 2004/05) moved to Sydney. The majority of immigrants came from Asia, led



by China and India. There was also significant growth in student numbers from Asia, and continued high numbers of tourists from Asia (www.Australiatodayhistoryofimmigration. htm).

Planned immigrant intake in 2005/06 had more than doubled compared with the intake of 1996. As at 2007 immigration accounted just over half the overall growth in Australia's population. In NSW and South Australia about three-quarters of the population growth could be attributed to immigration. The planned intake for 2007/08 was almost 153, 000- plus 13, 000 under the humanitarian program and in addition 24, 000 New Zealanders were expected to migrate under specific trans-Tasman agreement. Under the Howard Government the quota for skilled migrants rose significantly compared with the quota for family reunions (Hodge 2006, p. 91).

Australia's last multicultural policy, the Howard Government's Multicultural Australia United in Diversity (2003-2006) expired in 2006. A new multicultural advisory body was established by the Rudd Government in late 2008.

Some of the suggested main points of new Australian Multicultural policy introduced by the Rudd government can be identified as follows ( Hammer 2008)

- Recognition, acceptance and celebration of the cultural, linguistic and faith diversity based around the shared commitment to Australia's democracy and laws.

- A focus on the importance of intercultural and interfaith as relating to the importance of mutual understanding and respect between people of different ethnic, cultural, linguistic and faith backgrounds.
- Recognition of productive diversity and the great economic, social and cultural benefits of cultural, linguistic and faith diversity for all Australians.
- Recognition of the fundamental human right of all Australians to practice, preserve, enhance, share and celebrate their cultural, linguistic or faith heritage if they so choose.
- Strong indicators, measures and policies for social inclusion and economic participation for Australians from culturally, linguistically and faith diverse backgrounds.
- Greater recognition and incorporation of issues around cultural, linguistic and faith diversity within the important social inclusion policy agenda.
- Stronger and more creative policies and measures that address racism, and racial and religious discrimination and vilification.
- Implementation of a Multicultural Act, along the lines of the Canadian or Victoria Multicultural Acts, recognising Australia as a multicultural nation committed to access and equity for all its citizens regardless of background.
- Renewed investment in population, immigration and cultural, linguistic and faith diversity research.
- Stronger English language training and employment participation programs for migrants and refugees.

- A properly funded and resourced SBS also focussed on its multicultural and multilingual charter objectives, as well as adequate funding mechanisms for community based ethnic broadcasters.

(Hammer 2008)

In 2008-09, more than 171 000 migrants were granted visas under the Skill and Family Streams of Australia's Migration Program. In this same period nearly 670 000 people received temporary entry visas to Australia to undertake specific work or business, or to entertain, play sport, have a working holiday or study. In addition to this, 13 507 humanitarian entrants were granted visas to enable them to live in Australia to rebuild their lives, having fled persecution or suffering (Hammer 2008).

In October 2007, the Australian government announced a ban on refugees from Africa, which would be reviewed in mid-2008. Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews stated that refugees from Sudan were having problems integrating and those refugees from Burma and Afghanistan should take priority. However, after the Rudd Labour government was elected on the 25th of November 2007, Australia's stance on keeping refugees off shore changed and on the 8th of February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that all refugees kept on Nauru would be moved to Australia. This signalled the end of the Pacific solution ([www. ads. gov. au](http://www.ads.gov.au)).

The reality is that multiculturalism is about and for all Australians.

Multiculturalism is about mainstream Australia, because mainstream Australia is multicultural. The immigration has influenced the Australian society in numerous ways (Carter 2006, p. 341). Australia experiences a

brain gain, in that it records substantial net migration gains in all high skill and high qualification occupational categories. In addition Australia's growing population spends more and invests more – thus contributing to the expansion of the country's economy. Along with such essentials as food and housing, migrants set up new businesses and help business expansion through investment and their contributions to new technologies, which then produce extra goods and services in both the private and government sectors (Richards 2003).

Exotic food and flavors from other countries is another advantage. Moreover Australia is not only considerably richer in experiences, but enjoys much closer economic and social links with other nations as a direct result of diverse multicultural population. Australian fashion, food and culture have all been affected by multiculturalism because it makes up what it means to be Australian. (Hodge 2006, p. 91). Australia is proud of its multicultural society and enjoys the diversity of cultures that ongoing migration from around the world provides. The cultural diversity touches all Australians, benefits all Australians; its success has been achieved by all Australians and it should be cherished and celebrated by all Australians (Horne 1980). As a conclusion we could say even though that Australian culture has adopted lot of cultural backgrounds and different values the Australian society appears to be both multicultural and integrated as well.