

# Effects of changes in australian migration policy history essay



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Of critical importance when examining the causes and effects of changes in Australian migration policy, is to have some understanding of why migration policy was so restrictive. Australia has long been a land of immigrants since its British colonisation in 1788 although during the early British colonial period, Australia was marked as an outpost for the British cultural identity (Gibney & Hansen 2005: 34). As a result of this British influence, immigration policy within Australia was very restrictive as to who was allowed to enter, beginning with the removal, relocation and racism towards Aboriginal populations (Macintyre 2006: 169). Prior to the colonisation of Australia, small populations of Chinese and Pacific Islanders were able to immigrate although they were often restricted to working as labourers in the goldfields or factories (Gibney & Hansen 2005: 35). Non-British Europeans were also able to immigrate with few restrictions although their numbers paled in comparison to the number of British immigrants entering Australia prior to the 20th century (Macintyre 2006: 170).

Growing fears that Chinese and Pacific Island immigrants were threatening their jobs, resentment and racism towards Chinese and Pacific Islanders as 'outsiders' was growing (Hage 2006: 343). As a result in these rising tensions, the newly formed parliament of Australia implemented the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, which stopped any further Chinese and Pacific Islander immigration (Macintyre 2006: 170). The introduction of this act has long been considered the commencement of the White Australia Policy (Kirkby 2006: 184). Several amendments were made to the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 prior to World War 2 and during the post-war period which further restricted immigration into Australia, as many feared an influx of Asian

immigrants following the rise of Japanese supremacy and communism in China (Kirkby 2006: 185).

These subsequent restrictions on migration policy further illustrate the fear which many Australians held of the 'other' and their culture, as immigrants which were already residing within Australia were often divided and discriminated on the basis of their ethnicity and race (Papastergiadis 2006: 336). Growing fears of the 'outsider' were further stressed during the 1950's as many Aboriginals were forced to assimilate into 'white' society in order to breed out Aboriginal culture subsequently maintaining the dominance of the British cultural identity (Murphy 2006: 186). These fears of the 'outsider' have often been attributed to Australia's once very restrictive migration policy, as it was often thought that letting outsiders in would mean that there would be less jobs and opportunities for 'white' Australians and that 'outsider' culture would become dominant (Hage 2006: 343). Having gained an understanding of why migration policy was so restrictive, what caused migration policy to change and open up can now be examined.

It is also of crucial importance when examining the causes and effects of changes in Australian migration policy, is to have some understanding of what caused migration policy to change and open up. As a result of global conditions it was inevitable that Australian migration policy would have to change in order to maintain the survival of the nation, with many of these changes beginning in 1945 when immigration was viewed as being both necessary to build the population but also as an economic stimulus (Murphy 2006: 189). Despite these relaxations on immigration, the government

maintained that it would uphold the White Australia Policy claiming most  
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migrants would come from Britain (Murphy 2006: 189). Although 1949 would see the first steps taken towards a non-discriminatory immigration policy, when the decision was made by the then Immigration Minister Harold Holt to allow 800 non-white refugees to stay in Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2009).

Despite attempts to maintain White Australia, it was becoming more evident that it was just a dream of national identity, with more and more immigrants coming from all over Europe particularly that of Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia and Poland (Goldlust 2006: 351). These initial changes to migration policy during the 40's and 50's were based upon the need for labour in order to develop Australia's economic expansion, despite being expected to assimilate many European immigrants maintained their own cultural communities, such as that of Italians in Carlton and Greeks in Richmond (Hogan 2006: 12). The creation of these cultural communities further challenged the notions of White Australia, coming under constant attack it became evident that White Australia was more of a threat than a benefit to the nation (Goldlust 2006: 351).

As many European economies had been revived, the number of European migrants entering Australia had declined severely (Goldlust 2006: 351). Australia was subsequently forced to turn its attention towards Asia, although the racially discriminating immigration policies still stopped or turned away many Asian migrants (Salili & Hoosain 2001: 152). It was not until 1973 following the election of the Whitlam government a year earlier that the White Australia Policy was formally abandoned (Beilharz 2006: 196).

As a result several acts were passed most importantly that of the Racial  
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Discrimination Act 1975, which affirmed that any further immigration policies would not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity and that multiculturalism would be embraced (Beilharz 2006: 196). Subsequently Asian immigration increased with Australia now allowing immigrants to come from all over the globe (Salili & Hoosain 2001: 152).

Further changes to Australian migration policy during the 80's and 90's have allowed a greater number of refugees and exiles to relocate to Australia, with the majority of these migrants arriving from many war torn countries including that of the former Yugoslavia and many African countries (Kokanovic 2006: 353). As a result of these radical changes to immigration policy through the abolishment of racial discrimination since the end of World War 2, over 6 million migrants have settled in Australia with one third of all migrants having come from Asia, the Middle East and Africa (Goldlust 2006: 352). With a deeper understanding of what caused migration policy to change and open up, it can now be understood what impact these changes in migration policy have had on Australian society.

Furthermore it is of crucial importance when examining the causes and effects of changes in Australian migration policy, is to have some understanding of what impact these changes in migration policy have had on Australian society. Having undergone and continuing to undergo changes to immigration policies throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, Australia has often been labelled a racist nation due to its once extremely restrictive immigration policies which were almost exclusively British based (Dutton 2002: 79). With formal changes to immigration policies being adopted in 1973 Australia is now often labelled as the multicultural nation due to the <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-changes-in-australian-migration-policy-history-essay/>

diverse number of migrant populations which now reside within Australia (Andrews & Curtis 1998: 22). As a result these changes have affected Australian society in the sense that racism has been rejected and cultural diversity promoted and encouraged (Andrews & Curtis 1998: 23).

Subsequently Australian society has been effected as a whole as it no longer holds the same fears about the 'other' have now been removed after decades of migrant population growth, where in the policies of migrant assimilation have been discarded in favour of supporting and encouraging these migrant populations to maintain their culture, language, heritage, customs and traditions (Rundle 2006: 199). Although many migrant populations have relocated and integrated throughout Australia, many suburbs continue to remain the cultural homes of various ethnicities including that of Italians in Carlton, Lebanese in Brunswick, Vietnamese in Springvale and Chinese in Box Hill (Hogan 2006: 12). With an understanding of what impact these changes in migration policy have had on Australian society, individuals must remain aware that despite Australia becoming a multicultural nation its immigration policies are constantly changing to allow for the intake of new migrant populations.

In conclusion, there are three particular areas that an individual should examine when investigating the causes and effects of changes in Australian migration policy. They should gain an understanding of why migration policy was so restrictive, along with what caused migration policy to change and open up, which will allow them to understand what impact these changes in migration policy have had on Australian society. It is only by gaining an understanding into these areas that an individual can hope to be successful

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in examining the causes and effects of changes in Australian migration policy.