

The White Australia Policy

One of the first pieces of legislation enacted by the parliament of the newly federated Australian nation was the Immigration Restriction Act 1901. This Act, known as the White Australia policy, aimed to not only restrict numbers of non-white migrants to Australia, but also to deport 'undesirable' migrants who were already in the country.

Why a 'white Australia'?

In the 1800s the majority of the white population of the Australian colonies shared attitudes towards people of different races that by today's standards were openly racist. Criticisms of non-white groups were based on the idea that they were less advanced than white people in all ways, especially morally and intellectually. In Australia, this idea focused particularly on people of Asian descent but applied to all non-whites, including Indigenous Australians, who were considered a 'dying race'.

Federal Restrictions

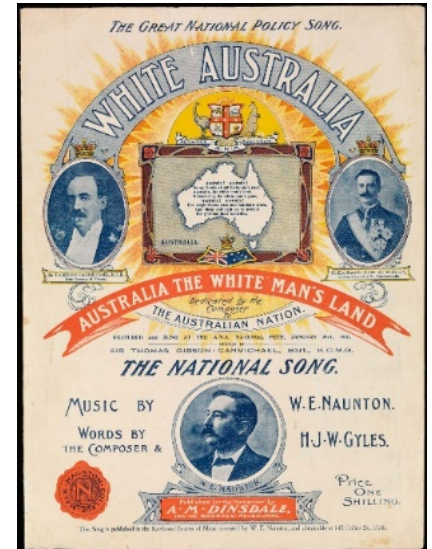
The Australian Government actively enforced the White Australia policy. British migration was favoured and encouraged, and a dictation test was administered as a way of stopping migrants from outside the United Kingdom from entering Australia. Immigration officers had the power to make any non-European migrant sit a 50-word dictation test.

As the language chosen for the dictation test was at the discretion of the immigration officer, it was easy to ensure failure for migrants deemed undesirable. Extremely small numbers of non-white migrants were ever allowed to pass. The test was administered 1359 times prior to 1909, with only 52 people granted entry to Australia. After 1909 not a single migrant made to sit the test passed. As a result, non-white people (including Australia's Indigenous population) made up only about two percent of the overall population in the early 1940s.

Multicultural Australia

In 1966 the Holt government led the most significant step towards the abolition of the White Australia policy. Under the new laws (and given bipartisan support in parliament) all potential migrants were subject to the same rules and restrictions with regard to acquiring visas, and were eligible to become Australian citizens after the same waiting period of five years. Despite passing these laws, the Government did not attempt to establish Australian migration offices in Asian countries or help for Asian migrants.

In 1973 the Whitlam Labor government definitively renounced the White Australia policy. In its place it established a policy of multiculturalism in a nation that is now home to migrants from nearly 200 different countries. In fact, Australia is the most successful multicultural society in the world.



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Questions

1. What was the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 also known as?

2. Only 52 people passed the dictation test. True / False

3. How did the Government stop migrants outside the United Kingdom entering Australia?

4. When did the White Australia Policy officially end?

5. Australia is now home to migrants from all over the world.
Approximately how many different countries do they come from?

50 / 100 / 200

6. Australia is the most successful multicultural society in the world.

True / False

7. What does the word 'undesirable' mean?
