

Study Guide for the Australian Collaboration Fact and Issue Sheet

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

FOR REVIEW

1. What has been the basis of the view that Indigenous people were “simple” and “uncivilised” before the arrival of European settlers to Australia, and on what basis might this view be refuted?
2. What was the estimated population of Australia at the time of European settlement?
3. What does the term *terra nullius* mean, and what is its significance in Australian history?
4. What is the name of the leader of the Nyungar people of Western Australia, who was considered one of the leading Indigenous resistance fighters?
5. By what percentage is it estimated that the Indigenous population of Australia was reduced in the first hundred years of so of European settlement? Name two significant contributing factors to this decline in population.
6. Name other impacts of settlement on the Indigenous population.
7. On what date was the national apology to Indigenous Australians given?
8. During what period was the policy of removing Aboriginal children from their families in place? Which particular part of the Indigenous population did it apply to?
9. Put down one of the main findings of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Australia?
10. Name two well-known Indigenous Australians and the area of cultural or other endeavour to which they have contributed.

FOR DISCUSSION

For each of the statements below, work in pairs or as a class to decide whether you agree or disagree, and to explain why:

1. “No real discrimination against Indigenous people exists in Australia, as people like Cathy Freeman demonstrate. Anyone can be successful if they really want to be.”
2. “The forms of dysfunction that are currently seen in Indigenous communities, such as violence against women and child abuse, are the result of disadvantage and alienation rather than a natural part of Indigenous society and culture.”
3. “Indigenous people must take responsibility for their own behaviour and problems.”
4. “The negative impacts of colonisation on Indigenous people are regrettable but they belong to the past and we should not be preoccupied with them today, especially when there are other, more urgent, practical problems to be dealt with.”
5. “At the end of the eighteenth century, the Europeans were the most advanced people and therefore it is only natural that they should have colonised and dominated other less advanced cultures and people.”

FOR RESEARCH

1. Use the internet and/or any of the references on the list provided under Useful Sources to investigate the history of the Indigenous struggle for land rights in Australia. When did this struggle for land rights begin, and what are its basic aims? What are some of the main outcomes thus far? What, for example, was the significance of the famous Mabo decision?
2. Use the internet and/or any of the works on the list provided under Useful Sources to investigate what are known popularly as the “history wars”. What are the elements of Australian history that have been most contentious, and what are the main lines of contention? Who are the main players in this debate? When and how did the debate begin, and is it still running?
3. Use the internet and/or any of the works on the list provided under Useful Sources to investigate the shifting nature of race relations in Australian history. What kinds of attitudes and ideas form the basis of current approaches such as reconciliation, for example, and how do these compare with the attitudes and policies of the past? Were there any significant turning points, and, if so, when did they occur?