

The White Australia Policy

Chinese Immigration

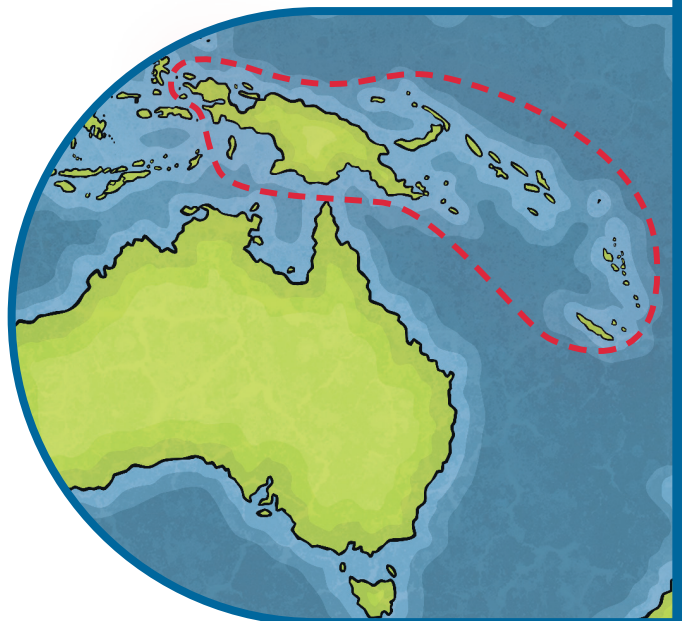
In 1851 the colony of New South Wales had a population of around 200,000, but with the discovery of gold, there was a huge influx of immigrants from around the world. Chinese were the largest ethnic group to migrate to Australia during this period. Between 1854 and 1855, 31 000 Chinese people immigrated to Australia in search of gold. Competition in the goldfields led to social tensions between ethnic groups, particularly between white miners and ethnic Chinese. Tensions led to a series of riots and protests against Chinese migrant workers.



In 1855 the Victorian government, in reaction to the ongoing protests, imposed a residency tax of £10 on all Chinese people who arrived in the colony. Restrictions were also imposed on arrival numbers, with just one Chinese person allowed for every ten tonnes of shipping. South Australia followed suit in 1857 by implementing a £10 residency tax of its own. New South Wales began taxing Chinese migrants in 1861.

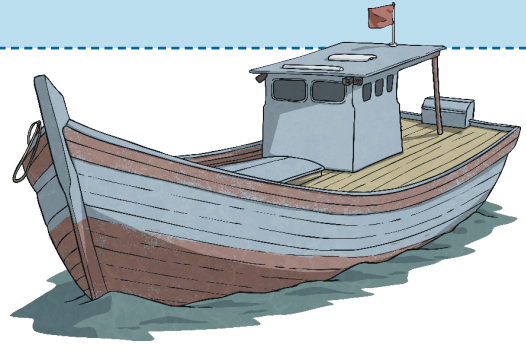
The Arrival of Pacific Islanders

From 1847 until well into the 1860s, Pacific Islanders, also known as South Sea Islanders, were brought to Queensland to work on sugar plantations. They were kidnapped from their homelands, or coerced with lies, and were brought to Australia to work as slaves. More than 60 000 Pacific Islanders arrived in Australia during this period. The majority of Pacific Islanders brought to Australia were from Melanesia, a region in Oceania that includes West Papua, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Bismarck, the Solomons, Santa Cruz, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia.



Anti-Asian Sentiment

A trade union is an organisation formed by a group of workers within a shared trade or profession (for example, construction workers or lawyers) who work together to protect and improve their rights and interests. During the 1870s and 1880s rallying from powerful trade unions and country-wide labour shortages led to high wages for the working classes. This was great for workers, but employers in an attempt to reduce costs began employing Chinese immigrants at a lesser wage. Trade unions argued that Chinese workers were taking jobs from white people, and tensions against ethnic Chinese people increased.



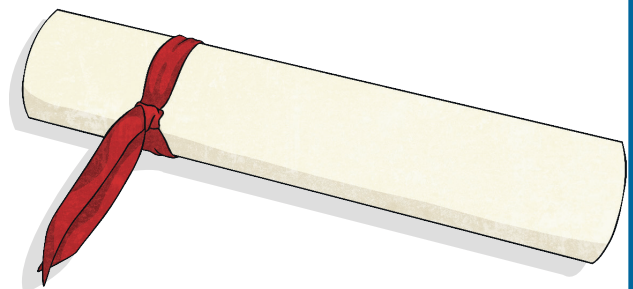
Between 1875 and 1888, in response to pressure from trade unions and growing concern from white communities, all Australian colonies introduced legislation to put an end to Chinese immigration. Chinese people already living in Australia were allowed to remain. Negative attitudes towards Japanese immigrants also developed during the 1890s after Japan defeated China in the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, and Australians began to fear a military invasion from Japan.

In 1895 the Australian colonies agreed to extend immigration restrictions to all non-whites, and in 1897 the Governors of New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania introduced the Natal Act to prevent 'undesirable persons' from migrating to Australia. Ethnicity was not specified within the policy but was understood to be the purpose of the new law.

Commonwealth Immigration Laws

On 1 January 1901, the six colonies of Australia were unified to become the new Commonwealth of Australia. To counter fears of a Japanese invasion and reduce ethnic tensions against Chinese people, the Commonwealth of Australia introduced two immigration laws within the first year of government:

1. **The Pacific Islander Labourers Act**
2. **The Immigration Restriction Act**



The Pacific Islander Labourers Act:

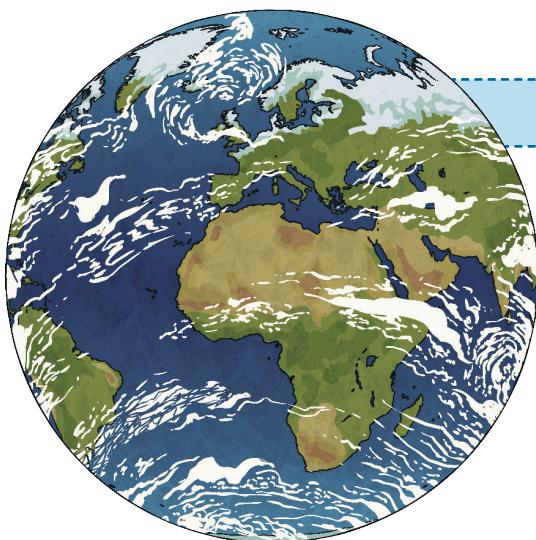
With the introduction of the Pacific Islanders Labourers Act in 1901, 7,500 Pacific Islanders were deported, and entry of all Pacific Islanders into Australia was prohibited from 1904.

The Immigration Restriction Act:

The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 was introduced to restrict immigration of non-white people and to deport non-white people already in Australia.

The First World War

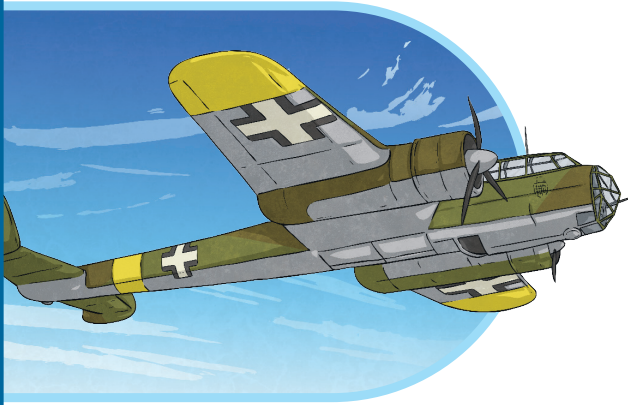
During the First World War, which began in July 1914, Japan fought as an ally alongside Australia and New Zealand against Germany, who had seized a number of territories in the Pacific. When the war ended on 11 November 1918, an international effort to establish lasting peace followed. The League of Nations was introduced to help solve ongoing and future disputes between all countries and prevent further war. During the League of Nations peace talks, Japan attempted to establish a policy of racial equality between member countries. Still, the Australian government rejected the idea as a direct threat to the White Australia Policy. The League of Nations rejected a policy of racial equality.



The Post-War Period

The White Australia Policy continued to be popular throughout the 1920s and 1930s. When the Great Depression began in 1929, global financial hardship followed. Fewer people travelled, and immigration to Australia was greatly reduced.

The Second World War:



The Second World War broke out on 1 September 1939. This time the Japanese were no longer allies but fought alongside Germany against Australia. Many Australian's began fearing a Japanese invasion from the north.

Thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Papua New Guinean and Timorese Peoples fought with Australian soldiers at the front line during the war and their dedication

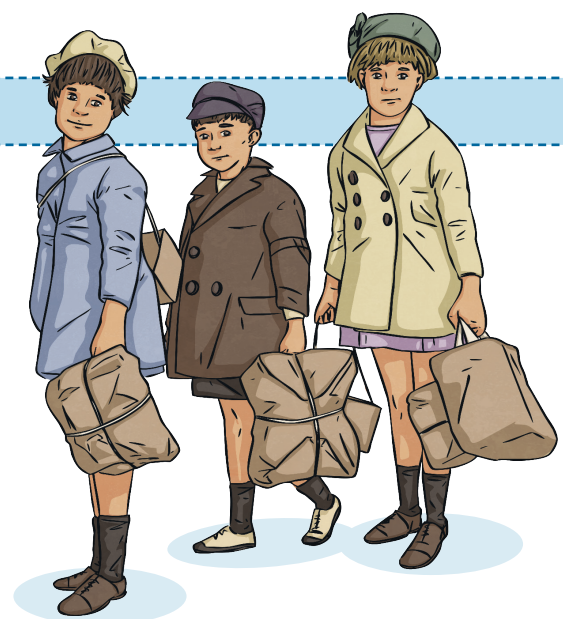
and commitment to the war effort brought the injustices of the White Australia Policy and the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples into focus. For the first time in decades, Australians began talking about the possibility of abolishing the White Australia Policy.

By the end of Second World War, on 2 September 1945, many young Australians had died in battle, and Australia was experiencing a labour shortage. With low population numbers and limited military power, the fear of an Asian invasion intensified. To counter these fears and boost population numbers, the Australian government introduced an immigration policy to entice English, Irish and European migrants to Australia.

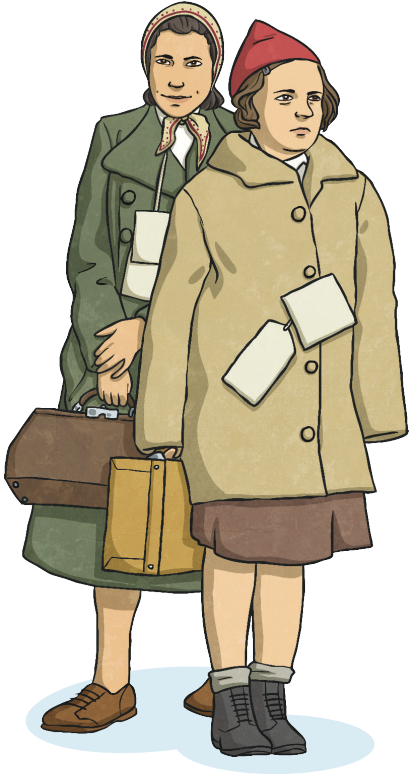
In 1949, the Wartime Refugees Removal Act was introduced to deport refugees from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines who had arrived in Australia during the Second World War seeking asylum. Even war hadn't softened Australia's attitudes towards Asia.

Post War Migration

In the five years following the end of the Second World War, the Australian government had accepted 200,000 European migrants. A further 2 million migrants arrived between 1950 and 1970 as Australia became known throughout the world as the 'lucky country'. The White Australia Policy was still in effect, but attitudes were slowly changing.



Small Steps Towards Change



- In 1949, small concessions were made, and around 800 non-white refugees were allowed to apply for residency in Australia.
- In 1950, Asian students were allowed to study at Australian Universities.
- In 1957, all non-Europeans who had lived in Australia for more than 15 years were granted citizenship.
- In 1958, the Migration Act was altered to allow 'highly qualified Asians' to immigrate to Australia.
- In 1959, Asian's who were married to Australian's were granted citizenship.
- In 1962, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were given the right to vote in federal elections.



The End of the White Australia Policy

In 1966, in the midst of the Vietnam War, the White Australia Policy was reviewed, and Vietnamese refugees were accepted into Australia for the first time. Further amendments were made to migration laws over the following years, and the White Australia Policy officially ended in 1973 when race was no longer considered a factor in the migrant selection process. The Racial Discrimination Act was implemented in 1975 making racial discrimination illegal for any purpose, including migration.