**SOCIAL IMPACTS**

The overall social impact of immigration upon Australian society has been extremely positive. This can be seen through the high level of intermarriage between individuals of different cultural backgrounds, the celebration of material culture (e.g. food, music and festivals) and the willingness of many to explore ‘other’ peoples’ belief systems. There have been times, however, when this social cohesion has been challenged.

**WHITE AUSTRALIA**

At the time of Federation, it was common for Australian of British backgrounds to view other ethnic groups as being inferior.

The belief that only British or white-skinned people should migrate to Australia was known as ‘The White Australia Policy’. The first Law passed by Parliament after Federation was 'The Immigration Restriction Act (1901). This was a set of laws that intentionally made it difficult for non-British people to migrate to Australia. The first version of the act prevented all non-British people from migrating to Australia. As the British Government objected to this condition, an alternative way to restrict non-British migration was introduced. A 50 word dictation test was given in any European language other than the first language of the applicant as a method of exclusion. The dictation test was used in Australia until 1958.

**OLD AND NEW RACISM**

It is positive to note that racism, based on a person’s biology which sociologists refer to as ‘old racism’ rarely occurs today. Unfortunately, racist attitudes have not disappeared completely from contemporary societies. Some researchers argue that these beliefs have been replaced by the more sophisticated ‘new racism’. New Racism victimises ethnic groups on the basis of cultural rather than biological differences.

The use of science to justify discriminatory beliefs and actions has been replaced by arguments calling for the preservation of the nation’s cultural identity. Robert Manne (2002) notes that these arguments are often accompanied by assertions of the incompatibility of particular cultural practices and religions. An example of this is that Islam does not belong in democratic societies. These experiences have led to a new concept known as ‘Islamophobia’. Further examples of new racism include the belief that affirmative action programs are not fair because they favour ethnic minority groups.

**SOME HELPFUL RESOURCES**

- Islamophobia Watch [www.islamophobia-watch.com/display/ShowJournal?moduleId=103277&categoryId=13410](http://www.islamophobia-watch.com/display/ShowJournal?moduleId=103277&categoryId=13410)
**Moral Panics**

The sociologist, Stanley Cohen (1980) introduced the concept ‘moral panic’ as a way to describe the reaction of the media to certain social groups and/or activities that are seen as a threat to social values. This process leads to a level of anxiety amongst the general population. The “panic” caused by the media places pressure on authorities to control and discipline the group(s) who have been labelled as a threat. The moral concern however, is that the event(s) are often reported in a way that is out of proportion to any real threat. Examples of moral panics relating to immigration within Australian society include boat people, migrants taking jobs, the abuse of welfare support and fear of terrorism.

**Political Impacts**

The Federal multiculturalism policy that was introduced in 1973 has evolved over time. There have been varying degrees of support for the policy from both sides of politics. Events such as the racial riots in Cronulla, Sydney, in December 2005 and the incidence of Muslim extremism in some migrant communities have been used by some to challenge the effectiveness of the policy.

Members of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party which was formed in the 1990’s, argued that multiculturalism threatened ‘traditional’ (Anglo) Australian culture and misused public funds on ‘minority groups’. In June 2011, the Ione Nation Party policy continues to argue that it wishes to “abolish multi-racialism and the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975.”

Another anti-multiculturalism party is the Australia First Party that has long argued for multiculturalism to be abolished as an official policy. The views of Australia First range from concerns that multiculturalism encourages ethnic ‘tribes’, increases the number of ‘rapes’, and that ethnic support groups should lose public financial support.

**Economic Impacts**

Immigration has had an extremely positive impact upon Australia’s economy over time. Approximately three million people migrated to Australia between 1945 and 1975. These migrants provided a labour force for manufacturing and worked on major development projects such as the Snowy Mountain River Scheme.

Migrants currently contribute to the economic development of Australian society in many ways. For example, they fill skill shortages, create a demand for goods and services and foster international trade through knowledge of overseas markets, business networks, cultural practices and languages other than English.

There has been considerable debate over the last few years about the need for a population policy and the role that migration may play. This debate has sprung from concern about the environment and Australia’s ageing population. Research suggests that migration can help to address some of the negative effects of an ageing population by adding to the population of the labour force.

**Activity**

Your teacher has given you a document entitled ‘Immigration Impacts’. It is a table that you can complete by independently researching information from the following sites (and others of your own choosing!) Enjoy:

1) Refugee council of Australia [www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)