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*Australia's History: Themes and Debates* is an introduction to current issues and major themes in Australian history. Among its topics are Aboriginal history, Australian national identity, immigration, urbanisation and Australia's historical relationships with Asia. Its editors, Martin Lyons, Professor of History at the University of New South Wales, and Penny Russell, lecturer in Australian history at the University of Sydney, have not aimed at a comprehensive coverage of Australian history. Rather, they have selected ten contributors – all of them leading historians in Australia – who have assessed the state of research in their area of current involvement. This research has been combined with their existing work.

In their introduction, the editors emphasize their aim to "illuminate the contemporary concerns of Australian historians for an audience of interested non-specialists in the field". This makes the book a comprehensive and good read for anyone interested in Australian history. *Australia's History: Themes and Debates* takes 'The Battlefields of Aboriginal History' (Chapter One) as a starting point, as the Aboriginal question is seen as a key issue in Australian history-writing. Its author Anna Haebich has published two award-winning books in Indigenous Australian history: *Broken Circles* and *For Their Own Good*. In this chapter, the author outlines histories of Aboriginal and white relations and gives an introduction of recent controversies over Australia's frontier history and the Stolen

Generation. It's a known fact that Aboriginal people have slipped from the nation's official history. Anna Haebich describes how the white representation of Aboriginal people was disrupted during the 1960's. She also draws on political issues such as John Howard's denial of responsibility for past wrongs and his call on historians to 'present the facts in a balanced manner'. The chapter concludes with the author's concern that the issues she has raised have largely been left unresolved.

The following chapter is entitled 'Unsettling Settler Society'. Penny Russell takes a look at the spreading of the settler society and describes how white colonisers took possession of a land they chose to call empty. Scholarship in Australia's colonial history traditionally had three major themes: Firstly, there was the theme of conquest, dispossession and settlement. The second theme dealt with the internal structures and relationships of white society. Relationships between Australia and England was another major theme. However, post-colonial critiques of race and imperialism demanded a more complex response in the 1990's. Nevertheless, white Australians made stories of 'nation' and enacted rituals of belonging. It was them who 'made the nation' by writing history. The author pays particular attention to Indigenous Australians and states that by making history, white Australians gained a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is inextricably linked to the story of Indigenous dispossession.

Chapter Three is entitled 'The View from the North'. Regina Ganter, who lectures in the School of Arts, Media and Culture at Griffith University, Queensland, points out that Australian histories tend to radiate out from Sydney and that the British have long been at the centre of a national narrative. In 1988, white Australia celebrated the Bicentenary which commemorated the white presence in the continent's south-eastern corner. However, the north had only a 100-year experience of sparse and patchy white settlement. In fact, the predominant experience of living in northern townships was of a poly-ethnic society with Indigenous and Asian communities. The beginnings of external contact with Australia took place long before the British arrival. Regina Ganter calls for a different Australian historical imagination without the black-and-white binary vision that tends to eclipse the north.

Australia's relationship with Asia from the 1890's to the present becomes the key theme of Chapter Four 'Australia's Asian Futures'. While Australia is linked to Europe by its history, it is geographically part of Asia. From the 1880's, the role that Asia might play in Australia's future has attracted sustained attention. Not only was there a concern about the rise of Asia but also a belief that proximity to Asia accentuated the danger of disease and racial contamination. Until the 1960's, the White Australia Policy won much support and Australia was to be kept free from what was considered Asian contamination. The chapter ends with the statement that it is integral to the understanding of Australia to define how 'Asia' is constructed and understood in Australia.

Charlie Fox, who teaches in the History Department at the University of Western Australia, examines 'The View from the West' in Chapter Five. Australia has a state-based identity which is created by all the things that render people part of a nation: politics, culture, history, myth and memory. Western Australia is, seen from a geographic and demographic point of view, a peripheral state. Because of the political and cultural action taking place in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra, it is of minor importance. There is a popular feeling that the east ignores the west and it even needs to be reminded that the west exists. However,

recent rewriting of Western Australian history has shown that Western Australia was never really different from the rest of the country. In Fox's view, Western Australians should more positively let their geography shape their view of their place in the nation.

Chapter Six called 'Immigration History' looks at Australia's history of immigration chronologically. Catriona Elder, who is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney, shows that the dominant idea of the Australian nation is of a 'white' place. There has always been a divide between immigrants who are 'white' (British and European) and those who are 'non-white' (everyone else). Since the arrival of the British convicts in 1788, there has been a constant influx of newcomers to the Australian continent. For example, the gold rushes drew thousands of newcomers to Australia. In the 1970's, the new wave of Asian migration re-ignited many of the old fears. In the early 2000's refugees arrived by boat on Australia's northern shores. Catriona Elder points out that immigration has shaped the Australian nation – often at the expense of Indigenous peoples.

In Chapter Seven, Richard White from the Department of History at the University of Sydney surveys a range of Australian national symbols over two centuries. In this chapter, entitled 'Symbols of Australia' the emphasis is put on non-Aboriginal symbol-making. Before Federation in 1901, there were many symbolic languages, jostling to represent the Australian continent. After Federation, official symbols tended to combine relatively neutral symbols of Australia (eg. the Southern Cross) with symbols of the British connection (eg. the Union Jack). Distinctive flora and fauna provided popular national symbols from an early date. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, national symbols were used commercially. Among the most powerful national symbols that have survived are the Billy Tea, the Qantas Kangaroo, the surf lifesaver and last but not least Uluru as the symbol for the heart of Australia.

Melanie Oppenheimer, senior lecturer in Australian history at the University of Sydney and Associate Professor Bruce Scates from the University of New South Wales are the authors of Chapter Eight called 'Australians and War'. The chapter identifies several different approaches to the study of war. The Australian War Memorial in Canberra is the most-visited of all Australia's museums. Additionally, at the centre of almost every Australia city stands a war memorial. With WW II and later conflicts, memorials became sites of multiple commemorations in Australia. Anzac Day has become Australia's national festival and a growing number of Australians are making pilgrimages to battlefields overseas.

Until 1990, the topic of Australian citizenship was a neglected national theme. As Alison Holland, lecturer at Macquarie University in Sydney, points out in Chapter Nine, today it is at the centre of debate about Australia's future. The chapter entitled 'The Common Bond? Australian Citizenship' describes how the meaning and practice of citizenship were being contested in a variety of forums, emphasizing the quest for equal citizenship that dominated Aboriginal people's and women's struggle in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It points out that their joint struggles were unfinished by the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter ends with the assumption that the lack of citizenship has served most Australian governments well and that it remains to be seen whether it will continue to do so in the future.

Seamus O'Hanlon, who teaches in the School of Historical Studies at Monash University, tells us the 'Australian urban story' in Chapter Ten. The fact that Australia is one of the most urbanised cities in the world – 85 % of the population live and work in towns of 1,000 or

more residents – contrasts with Australia's self-image of a rural people sleeping under the stars or wrestling crocodiles. Thus, it seems logical that until relatively recently the cities were largely absent from the Australian story, including Australian historiography. However, the ideal of home-ownership and the benefits of suburban living became the mark of social respectability for both working and middle-class citizens in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Australia. One of the main messages of this last chapter called 'Cities, Suburbs and Communities' is that to be able to understand Australia one needs to understand the power of the 'idea of home'.

*Australia's History: Themes and Debates* combines the discussion of current issues in different fields with overviews of how topics and methods of research have changed over the past decades. This makes the book an interesting read for non-specialists in Australian history and keeps the reader up-to-date with a great variety of topics. It offers an interesting insight into the change of Australian historiography over the decades, starting from the European imagination of Australia as a land full of curiosities and leading up to historians drawing attention to the destructive impact of colonisation. Some emphasis is put on Aboriginal questions as well as on multiculturalism and Australia's proximity to Asia. In this respect, the essays point out that there is a need for rewriting parts of established national histories in order to do justice to all the people of Australia, be they Aboriginal, white, Asian or of any other cultural background. Throughout the book, questions such as 'What does it mean to be an Australian citizen?' and 'Who made the Australian nation?' are asked. While some answers are put forward, the contributors encourage their readers to come up with their own answers. For students thinking of specialising in Australian history, each chapter ends with respective footnotes and suggestions for further reading can be found at the end of the book.