

U3A Hawthorn: “Australia’s First Peoples: Then and Now” : Course Information

Understanding the First Peoples (Australian Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders) by examining and integrating the aspects below

THE WAY INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS CAN BE VIEWED OR CATEGORISED IN POLITICS AND STUDIED BY ORDINARY PEOPLE (THIS GROUP)		
“Traditional”	“Symbolic”	“Practical”
History (What happened)	Identity, Recognition and Respect	‘Closing The Gap’: Education, Housing & Employment
Anthropology (How they lived): Customs & Culture	Apology and Generating Trust	Opportunity: Capacity building, Positive discrimination
Land, Law and Language	Human Rights, Land Rights, Native Title	Political awareness and Political action
Relationships: Tribe, Clan & Family	Stolen Generation, Deaths in Custody	Adapting to ‘foreign’ Law, Legal representation, Redress
Spirituality, Cosmology and Sorcery	Political representation: First Peoples Congress	Communication between groups & with Governments
World View & Values (Philosophy)	‘Act Of Recognition’ by Federal Parliament	Positive Discrimination on basis of Need, not Race
Knowledge: Bush medicine, Land& water management	Proposed Constitutional Recognition of First Peoples	Land Use: Fair agreements with Govt. & private sector
	Proposed Treaty or Compact	

THE FIRST PEOPLES ARE IN TRANSITION → INTO THE DOMINANT SOCIETY → AND (PARTIAL) CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

REMOTE including Urban Fringe Settlements (+/- 25-30%)	URBANISED (+/- 70-75%)
More Traditional, Apparent Stereotype of ‘pure blood Aboriginal’	Not easily recognised as ‘Aboriginal’, generally mixed ancestry
More traditional Culture and World View, but knowledgeable Elders dying out	Problems with retention and passing on of Culture and Knowledge
Strong connection to the land (to Nature)	Loss of connection to the land (and to Nature)
Sacred sites and objects, tribal land, customs and rituals	Little or no opportunity or need for customary practices
“Sharing”, Communal Land Ownership, ‘Traditional Owners’ decisions important	Individuality and Individualism, personal property and wealth, ‘Aspirational’
Pressures with Land Use and Mining Agreements, no right of veto	Occasionally become involved with ‘traditional land’ and associated conflicts
Presently benefits from Mining seen as best path to Development by some	Mining or Land Use agreements have little or no benefit (due to loss of land title)
Racism: Overt, associated with skin colour, behaviour & resenting special privileges	Racism: More subtle, may be associated with claiming Aboriginality for benefits
Do the voices of the articulate (mostly the urbanised Aboriginals) represent what Remote Aboriginal people want or need?	
Is it necessary for the Remote Aboriginals to <i>Re-Educate</i> the Urbanised Aboriginals in the ways of traditional cultural life?	

Reference Book: “Indigenous Australia For Dummies” by Larissa Behrendt

Part 1: Overview, Dreamtime, Aboriginal Worldview	Part 4: Contemporary Indigenous Cultures (languages, nations, clans, Sport, Arts)
Part 2: History (Invasion) Little awareness, conflicting stories	Part 5: Current Issues (material, physical, social, legal) Economic opportunities
Part 3: Indigenous Activism (fight for rights)	Part 6: The Part of Tens: Cultural sites, Firsts, Myths, Legal decisions

Turn Over (if reading a printed version)

Broad list of Topics

1. RIGHTS
Human Rights: HREOC & Amnesty International
NT Emergency Response & extension (Stronger Futures)
Replacement of Indigenous institutions
Land rights, Native Title, no veto esp. over mining
2. REPARATION
Stolen Generation, Apology and Compensation
Healing Foundation
3. REPRESENTATION & ARTICULATION
Traditional Owners & “Big men” of the community
“Urban Aboriginals”, “half-castes” and “coconuts”
Indigenous Land Councils and their leaders
National Congress Of First Peoples
4. GOVERNANCE & DECISION-MAKING
Understanding majority & Indigenous politics (for us)
Understanding their choices (for them)
Consensus or majority vote? Time limitation forces decision
First Peoples’ diversity favours the majority “divide and rule”
5. EXPRESSION & ACTION
Expressive Arts: Music, Theatre, Film, Writing, Oratory
Sport and sporting-related activism
Public protests, “Freedom Ride”, Rallies
“Walk-Offs”, Blockades, Tent Embassies, Camps,
Tent Embassy/Invasion Day/ Survival Day/Sovereignty Day (Jan 26),
Sorry Day (May 26), Mabo Day (June 3, Torres Strait),
Tent Embassy 40th Anniversary Jan 2012, Sacred Fire (1998--)
6. PHYSICAL, MENTAL & SOCIAL PROBLEMS
Housing and Health
Alcohol and other substance abuse
Violent assault, Risk-taking behaviour, Suicide

Questions To Consider alongside Discussion Topics

1. Are Aboriginal (First Peoples) cultures or world-views immutable or changeable?
2. Can traditional law be modernised and incorporated into the imposed (foreign to First Peoples) system of law?
3. Can the First Peoples develop a genuine ‘national’ representative voice?
4. Should the system of land ownership be changed from communal to private? Or something in between? (Productive land use)
If based on leases, should they be long (99 yrs) or short-term (40 yrs)?
5. How will item (4) affect Traditional Owners? Should any change in land tenure be decided by Federal politicians, by First Peoples via consensus decision within their (tribal) group, or by majority vote?
6. Can we (the Majority) learn from the First Peoples how to integrate with or live with Nature? (“Caring for Country”)
What can we learn from an older culture that may help with our present-day problems?
7. In what ways can we contribute to repairing the human relationships between the First Peoples and other Australians?
8. Is understanding the First Peoples more important than, or just as important as, “practical’ actions such as “Closing The Gap”?
9. Is it important to learn about the First Peoples as a step towards sharing this understanding with fellow Australians? Would you consider that this could be called “practical reconciliation”?