



Minutes of Evidence Curriculum & TRP

Topic 4: *How did the 'Indigenous condition' measure up to the general conditions and aspirations of the nation and state at the time? Marvellous Melbourne - for whom?*

Key theme(s): Dispossession; justice

Additional theme(s): tradition; community; identity; rights and freedoms

Victorian Curriculum link:

Causes of population movements and settlement patterns during this period and the significant changes to the way of life of groups of people ([VCHHK130](#))

Key social, cultural, economic, and political features of one society at the start of the period ([VCHHK133](#))

Intended and unintended causes and effects of contact and extension of settlement of European power(s), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ([VCHHK134](#))

If the above hyperlinks do not work in PDF – visit the curriculum via:

<http://tinyurl.com/j85w2pg>

Part 2: The situation of Victorian Aborigines in the lead up to Federation

In the latter half of the 19th century the Aboriginal population of Victoria continued to decline. At the 1877 census of the Indigenous population there were 1067 Aborigines, of whom slightly fewer than half lived on reserves. By the mid-1880s the number of Aborigines had dropped to 844 individuals. Of this total 594 resided either on a reserve or close by. A further 250 Indigenous people (mostly around the Swan Hill area) preferred to live in their own land (BPA 1885). The government did not have the ability to make all Aboriginal

people live on the reserves. At the 1877 census there were Aboriginal people living in 61 locations in Victoria, over and above the six reserves. As time went by, more Aboriginal people found their way to the reserves. After 1869 however, Aboriginal people required certificates and contracts if they wanted to work outside the reserves.

Through the 1880s and 90s about 70% of the Aborigines in Victoria were largely confined to six reserves, spread across the colony. Aboriginal activism had led to these reserves being sited in areas where they could cater to different nations. Five of the six reserves had been established by church groups – Lake Tyers (1861) and Ramahyuck (1863) in Gippsland; Framlingham (1866) and the Lake Condah Mission (1869) in the western district, and Ebenezer (1859) in the Wimmera). Coranderrk station was set up by the government in 1863. By the mid-1880s however, they were all at least partially government funded (Attwood 1989; Caldere and Goff 1991; Critchett 1980; Massola 1970). (See Map 2)

The passing of the 1886 *Aboriginal Protection Act* (often referred to as the 'Half-caste Act') struck a savage blow to the viability of all of these stations, by exiling the most able-bodied of the male residents (Nanni and James 2013; Christie 1979). This was an amending Act however, one that simply added a further (albeit critical) restriction to those already applying to the Aboriginal residents of the reserves. The major controlling influence on Aboriginal lives, the 1869 *Aboriginal Protection Act*, was still in force. This Act prescribed where Victorian Aborigines could live, restricted their movements, controlled how much they could earn, and determined how the money allocated to Aboriginal services could be spent (Broome 2005; Nanni and James 2013). The BPA had complete control over the lives of residents. Examples of the degree to which this control was exercised are commonplace. In late 1885 two young boys were taken from the Ramahyuck Mission to England to be part of the Victorian Court exhibition at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886. It was believed that as the race was thought to be 'dying out', it would make an appealing display for visitors to have the boys demonstrate traditional skills such as throwing boomerangs (Australian Archives, B313

Item 244). Another example of the social control exercised by the BPA comes from records of the Lake Condah Mission from the early years of the 20th century. In 1904 two young men named Green and Courtwine were prohibited from leaving the Lake Condah Mission to play football for a local club, and threatened with expulsion if they continued to absent themselves (MacFarlane 1993).

Thus in the years leading up to Federation Indigenous Victorians had little, if any, access to the facilities and attractions of 'Marvellous Melbourne' and enjoyed none of the benefits made available to other Victorians through the enormous wealth flowing from the goldfields.