

Making a difference

Democracy, Law and Citizenship

Transcript

Part 1: Freedom Rides, Introduction

The use of the term Aboriginal here includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

Since the arrival of James Cook in 1770 with the declaration of *Terra Nullius* 'the land belongs to no one', to the birth of Australia in 1901, Australia's Aboriginal people had been subjected to colonial government policies that varied from state to state. All refused basic human rights to Aboriginal Australians, so much so that in 1837 the British Government criticised the Australian colonies for the practice of genocide.

With the birth of Australia in 1901, the Commonwealth Constitution outlined that when a population count was carried out 'Aboriginal natives shall not be counted' and that Commonwealth would legislate for 'any race except Aboriginal people'. Furthermore In 1902 Aboriginal people were excluded from voting. This meant that each state had the power to make laws as they saw fit for the Aboriginal people of their state. While state laws did vary, all were characterised by paternalistic policies. Movement, marriage, employment of Aboriginal Australians were all controlled by the states. These policies even led to the removal of children from Aboriginal families, commonly known as the Stolen Generation. Aboriginal people lived life on reserves and missions. In 1951 a policy of assimilation was adopted and Aboriginal Australians were 'to live like whites'. This was closely followed by the policy of integration and in 1962 Aboriginal people became eligible to vote in Federal Elections, although voting was not compulsory.