

“Australia – New Country, Old History”
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**Australian Aboriginals and American History:
Developing a Global Theme in the Secondary Classroom**

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Grade of Students: 11-12

The project is for high school teachers of American history. It's an internet research project wherein students will compare and contrast Aboriginal Australians to Native Americans with additional comparisons to African Americans. Themes can be developed over the school year which will hopefully keep the history of Native and African Americans at the forefront of the curriculum while they are dealt with in traditional survey areas. The themes of human rights, freedom, economic opportunity, cultural pluralism, cultural identity and "reconciliation" should be presented as themes that make American history understandable in a more global context.

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In a speech entitled, “Rethinking American History in a Global Context,” Thomas Bender, professor of history at New York University, urged high school teachers to teach the history of America, as if it were a “province” in the larger history of the world. If historians teach the nation’s history in “isolation from its historical relations,” Bender warned, they “bear some responsibility for the ways Americans understand (or misunderstand) their relation to the world.”

www.apcentral.collegeboard.com/members/article/

Vital in the twenty-first century, the theme of globalization, is one of a dozen themes that the College Board, which hosted Bender’s speech, hopes will enrich the education of high school students. By serving as “unifying concepts,” the Board, like Bender, hopes that such important themes will help students “place the history of the United States into larger analytical contexts.”

Of course, addressing, in-depth, any critical, modern theme, such as globalization, is one of the many academic challenges facing secondary school teachers today. The curriculum is crowded enough already, some would argue, and, indeed, added to the requirement that specific content be covered, are the additional demands, increasingly made by state and local school boards, that reading, writing, and even technological skills, be taught and measured against publicized standards. For its part, the College Board, which provides teachers of Advanced Placement high school history with a broad, chronological outline of American history, (from “Pre-Columbian Societies to the “Post-Cold War World,”), perceptively suggests that its themes might more conveniently be employed as ideas for long or short term class projects. The Board encourages, moreover, that students and teachers “develop their own course themes, as they look at the American past “through a variety of lenses” and “from “multiple perspectives.”

www.apcentral.com

In many respects, a research project can be an ideal way to address some of the important demands made on today’s classroom teacher. Raising vital questions, gathering and assessing information, communicating effectively, and “relating what one is learning in a particular subject to other subjects and to what is significant in human life, are essential components of the discipline of learning,” as Richard Paul and Linda Elder, from the Foundation for Critical Thinking, so cogently argue in their valuable little book, *How to Study and Learn* www.criticalthinking.org. But while high school libraries vary in the quantity and quality of materials they have on hand for research, the internet, on the other hand, can not only provide students with a much richer venue for researching the kinds of global comparisons suggested by professor Bender, but can, when directed by teachers, sharpen the analytical and technological skills called for by their communities.

An example of just how rich, relevant, and rewarding a global comparison can be, is evident in contrasting and comparing the history of Indigenous people in both Australia and the United States. In fact, the study of Australian Aboriginals can provide American students with an important additional perspective. For not only have Australian Aboriginals been dispossessed of their lands, like Native Americans, but they also have experienced the sharp, pervasive sting of racism, all too familiar to African Americans.

Almost any textbook survey of American history can serve as a starting point for students to begin making comparisons, and while scholars of both Native American and African American history have justly complained that the history of both sometimes gets short shrift in survey classes, a long term research project can serve to keep the critical issues associated with their history in the forefront. The comparison can hopefully lead, moreover, to a broader discussion of those issues that a democratic American society would do well to foster in the twenty-first century; globally relevant issues such as, human rights, freedom, economic opportunity, cultural pluralism and cultural identity, and finally, and perhaps most importantly, an honest coming to grips with the brutal reality of our separate but related histories, captured so perfectly in the current hope for “reconciliation.”

American teachers would do well, of course, to familiarize themselves, to whatever extent possible, with the rich and fascinating history of Australia. Manning Clark’s readable and readily available, *A Short History of Australia* (Penguin Books, 4th edition, 1995), is a good place to start. But the key book in understanding Australian Aboriginals, and the one I have used to set up the following project, is Richard Broome’s, *Aboriginal Australians: black responses to white dominance 1788-2001*. (Allen & Unwin, 3rd edition, 2001). Broome’s analysis and rhetorical passion is somewhat reminiscent of the best writings of American historians of the 1960s and 70s, and of historians of any age, who are engaged in the contemporary struggle for human rights.

I have divided the main suggested areas of comparison into five groups, but these, of course, can be subdivided. Students can individually research and report on any one theme or era, or they can work as a group and jig-saw their presentation. Naturally, there will be overlapping as certain themes run continually throughout Aboriginal history. I have also, for each section, quoted from Broome, whose summaries suggest a direction the research may or may not take.

I. ABORIGINAL ORIGINS; TRADITIONAL CULTURE; EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS

“So it was that while the Indians of North America or the Maoris of New Zealand, who built villages, tilled the soil and had chiefs were offered treaties and some recognition of rights by the British, the Aborigines were not given any of these rights.”

Broome, P. 30-31

A. What does anthropological research suggest?

How old is Aboriginal culture? diversity of tribes; technology; semi-nomadic; hunters and gatherers; habitats; food (bush tucker); art; medicine; trade; tribal territory; tribal membership; language; relationship to the land; religion; Dreamtime; Ceremonies (birth, marriage, death, initiation for girls and boys); social relationships (kinship system- codes of behavior, duties and responsibilities, exchange of gifts); childhood; inter-tribal disputes; relationships between men and women (“women’s business”)- partnerships; leadership; power and authority.

B. Who were the “Discoverers” of Australia? chronology of discovery; reasons for settlement; the settlers themselves; preconceived ideas (stereotypes- “savage” or the “noble savage; definitions of “black” and “white”).

Enlightenment thinking; initial reactions of both Europeans and aboriginals to each other; language barriers; misunderstandings; trade; prevailing ideas of landownership- private property; ‘terra nullius’; violence; British government policy; Humanitarians- difference between civilized and primitive; role of Christianity- “Native Institution” (educating Christianizing, and vocational education); Missionaries

C. British policy over time; wool; European immigration; land grab; pastoral economy of settlers; pastoralism; disruption of Aboriginal food supplies; Aboriginals and stock management; “stealing” of stock;” Weaponry and fighting tactics of Europeans and Aboriginals (guerrilla campaigns); massacres- Myall Creek and Gravesend; the “Black War;” disease; hunger; “Native Police Forces” and reasons for joining; “dispersal;”

D. Internalizing European values (loss of identity- “lost between two worlds.”); Racism; Great Chain of Being; “scientific theory;” Social Darwinism; policies of colonial governments; Tasmanian Aboriginals and Finders Island; Protectorates, i.e. Port Phillip; Aboriginal resistance to Christianity, farming, and western education; vital statistics- casualties

II. DISPOSSESSION; DECIMATION; RESISTANCE

“Each confrontation was a dramatic clash between the Aboriginal people who saw the land religiously, as an intimate part of themselves and all life, and the European who saw it economically, as a commodity to be taken, exploited, bought and sold.” This clash was enacted again and again as the frontier of settlers moved across the southern and eastern parts of Australia between the years 1820 and 1870.”

Broome, p. 40

A. “Coming-in;” obtaining European food (tobacco, sugar, tea); changing diet; malnutrition; banning of alcohol by Europeans; impact of alcohol; mistreatment of Aboriginal women; European diseases (smallpox, influenza, Measles, dysentery, tuberculosis, venereal disease); Aboriginal view of death and sorcery; acceleration of inter-tribal fighting because of the European intrusion; extinction (Tasmanian Aboriginals); population decline; causes of deaths; birth rate decline; fatalism- “some Aboriginals thought life was not worth living;” attraction of Aboriginals to “the novelties” of European culture (clothes, guns, houses); individualistic European culture compared to communally-based Aboriginal culture; changing culture of Aboriginals under the onslaught; fringe dwellers.

B. Aboriginal adaptation for survival; Aboriginal Cricket team; contribution to “battler” tradition; “reserves;” Aboriginal agricultural enterprises (reasons for failures and success); wages; Aboriginal Protection Association; Attitudes of leading Missionaries; white paternalistic attitudes; hindrances to Aboriginal initiative; Victorian Aboriginal Act of 1886 (dispersal and absorption policy); Mission life; missions as places of control.

III. ASSIMILATION; SEPARATION; INTEGRATION

“Racism occurs when two groups see themselves as being physically and *racially* (as opposed to just culturally) different and when one group claims the alleged inferiority of the other group is *caused* by the innate physical differences of its members. This more extreme form of prejudice occurs when one group seeks to dominate and exploit the other through invasion, economic control or slavery. In recent times racism has been linked with European colonial expansion.”

Broome, p. 91

A. From ethnocentrism to Racism; Aboriginal legislation before 1900 that restricted their lives and freedom; European concept of “savagery;” “scientific theory;” phrenology; rationalizing dispossession (i.e. “Manifest destiny”)

B. European self- image (noble pioneers, individualists, progressive, user of resources); Pioneer themes (writings of Banjo Paterson, Henry Lawson); denigration of Aboriginals; decline in legal status; impact of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (1859); Social Darwinism; racial contamination

C. Aboriginal resistance and destruction in the northern frontier; Aboriginal “outlaws;” bush ranging; beche-de-mer industries; Queensland Act of 1897 and subsequent amendments (white racism and humanitarian paternalism converge, “half-caste,” segregation on isolated government reserves, prohibition of alcohol, no vote, limitations on personal freedoms, prohibition of sexual fraternization, restrictions on inter-racial marriages, compulsory labor contracts; compulsory medical inspections, prohibition of traditional practices; confinement of different tribes on reserves, model for other acts); location of reserves; total number in reserves, demographics.

D. Christian missions in the northern regions; Catholic missionaries; life at the missions; conflict of spiritual beliefs; humanitarianism; “coming-in;” paucity of government support until the 1950s; paternalism; authoritarianism; children and dormitory life; education; physical punishment; conservative missionaries and liberal humanitarian missionaries; cultural conflicts at missions, especially initiation and polygamy; Aboriginal attempts to remain traditional and benefit from the missions; Aboriginal perceptions of Christianity; conversion rates; role of the government and missions beginning in the 1950s; Aboriginal missions today.

E. Aboriginals in the northern cattle industry 19th century to 1960s; attitudes of pastoralists (low wages, stock work, style of dress, horsemanship, skills; employment of Aboriginal women; energy deficient-diet; “walkabout” time; housing-Aboriginal camp; segregation; language as a means of maintaining dominance; violence; Western Australian Aboriginal Act of 1905, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Ordinance of 1911, the Queensland State Children’s Act of 1911- paternalism and absorption;

F. Day to day resistance of Aboriginals to absorption of their culture and loss of identity; masking one's identity; runaways; decline and persistence of traditional life;

G. Impact of World War II on Aboriginals in the Northern Territory; labor strikes; Pindan Mob; Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders; job training; unemployment; "culture of poverty"

IV. HUMAN RIGHTS AND SELF-DETERMINATION

“. . .the rights of Aboriginal people have been revolutionized since the 1930s, but there is still a way to go because in the end rights only depend on community attitudes which have been slow to change. . . .the real changes from protective coercion to equality only came as recently as the 1960s, and still have to be finalized in Queensland.”

Broome, p. 187

A. New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act of 1909; “fringe dwellers;” color bar and caste system; unofficial caste barriers (churches, community organizations, social clubs); 1976 Anti-Discrimination Act; “Stolen Generations;” breaking the caste barrier through sports; low wages, poor jobs, housing conditions; Aboriginal infant mortality rates; diet-compare to American slaves and Native Americans on reservations; education; culture of poverty and alienation and resistance; alcoholism; self-denigration;

B. Defiance (continuation of Aboriginal culture, a sense of injustice, creation of a strong group identity); day to day resistance; accomplishments in athletics (boxing, football, tennis); the changing demographics of Aboriginals in the 20th century- growth in population; the “half-caste question” of the 1930s; fears of miscegenation; New South Wales Aboriginal Protection Act of 1936; Association for the Protection of Native Races (APNR); growth of protest movements by Aboriginals beginning in the 1930s; proposal for “Day of Mourning,” 1938; Aboriginals and World War II

C. The changing nature of Assimilation policy; absorption –difference?; global awareness of the plight of Aboriginals; Aboriginal movement to the cities in the 1960s-urbanization; Aboriginal advancement groups; Aboriginal leadership in the 1960s; Freedom Ride, 1965; Policy movement by whites away from assimilation; idea of cultural pluralism; Aboriginal citizenship, 1967; Federal versus State controls; condition of reserves; Commonwealth Games of 1982; Racial Discrimination Act of 1975; white-backlash; demographics and treatment of Aboriginals in prisons

V. RECONCILIATION

“Whether Australians choose to move along the path of confrontation or arbitration, there must finally be a reconciliation between black and white Australians.”

Broome, p. 205

A. Aboriginal Embassy in Canberra, 1972; the Woodward Report (Northern Territory (N.T.); 1974; Kakadu National Park; Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Act, 1976; Federal versus State governments on Aboriginal issues; vacant Crown land; Mining and Aboriginals; Aboriginal control over land usage; demographics of Northern Territory; Aboriginal flag; Aboriginal festivals and cultural revival; demographics of outstations; Aboriginal literature; Aboriginal Island Dance Theater; Black Theater groups; Black studies courses; Victorian Aboriginal Health Service; developing pride and independence

B. Northern Territory Land Rights Act, 1976; Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act; Opposition to land acts by Pastoral and Mining interests; Aboriginals and mining royalties; growth of outstations; white backlash- advertising campaigns; reasons for high rates of unemployment; Compare housing, health, education to American Natives; life expectancy; diseases; infant mortality rate; Over-policing by white community; Racial Discrimination Act, 1975; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1986; New South Wales (NSW) Racial Vilification Act, 1989; Racism in sports, attempts to eliminate; the Treaty debate; Bicentennial controversy; Barunga Festival and Statement, 1988; “Dreamings, the Art of Aboriginal Australia,” New York City, 1988-89; Aboriginal filmmakers; Aboriginal radio stations; Aboriginal writings; Eddie Mabo and the Mabo case, 1992; “terra nullius;” Wik Decision, 1996. communal title; opposition of mining and pastoral interests; Native Title Act, 1993; census data on Aboriginals; Reconciliation; Sydney Olympics 2000.

The following internet sites are just a start and are listed in no particular order. Each one of them can lead to additional sites and additional areas of research.

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/croc/sub2.htm

www.aecf.org/initiatives/jobsandrace/whatis

www.alc.org.au/

www.nit.com.au/

www.nla.gov.au

www.asknow.gov.au

www.nntt.gov.au

www.humanrights.gov.au

www.atsic.gov.au

www.abs.gov.au

www.aiatsis.gov.au

www.reconciliation.org.au

www.journeyofhealing.com

www.australiaday.gov.au

www.aboriginalhunter.com

www.nga.gov.au/memorial

www.ozco.gov.au/boards/asia

www.bangarra.com.au

www.mq.edu.au/house_of_aboriginality/index.htm

www.yothuyindi.com

www.vibe.com.au

www.jimmylittle.com.au

www.ausport.gov.au

www.library.trinity.wa.edu.au/aborigines/sports.htm

www.abc.au/olympics/2004/profiles/full_au_team.htm

www.afl.com.au

www.unicorn.aiatsis.gov.au/index.html

www.fatsil.org

www.dnathan.com/VL/austLang.htm

www.nationalcapital.gov.au

www.antar.org.au

www.ausflag.com.au

www.magabala.com

www.iad.edu.au/

www.vicnet.net.au

www.koorimail.com

www://primeministers.naa.gov.au

www://catalogue.nla.gov.au

www.anmm.gov.au

www.foundingdocs.gov.au

www.itsanhonour.gov.au

www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/ajac.nsf/pages/index

www.racismnoway.com.au

www.loreoftheland.com.au/index.html

www.curriculum.edu.au/democracy/case_studies/aranda/case.doc

www.curriculum.edu.au/democracy/case_studies/claremont/c_case.htm

www.junogemes.com

www.whatworks.edu.au

<http://www.aboriginalaustralia.com/>

<http://aboriginalart.com.au/>

www.sl.nsw.gov.au

www.pictureaustralia.org