

VCE AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Voices for Change

1965-2000

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VOICES FOR CHANGE 1965-200

**A resource for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)
Australian History (Unit 4) course.**

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Preface

Australia experienced significant economic, political, social and cultural change during the latter decades of the 20th Century. The nature of our society was challenged, and at times the nation shifted its conventions and perspectives.

The final Area of Study in the VCE Australian History course examines *Voices for Change 1965-2000* within this context.

This text aims to provide students with the essential content and skills to tackle this section of the final examination. It is also intended to be a pivotal resource in preparing for the associated School Assessed Coursework (SAC) task.

In Area of Study 2, students examine two of the five prescribed topics. The VCE Study Design prescribes that ‘students should be able to analyse and evaluate’ these selected changes by drawing on ‘the key knowledge and key skills outlined in the Area of Study’.

Dedicated sections on four of these areas of change form the core of this book. This textbook has been designed to cover these essential course requirements in one accessible and comprehensive resource.

In terms of School Assessed Coursework (SAC) requirements, schools have the option to assess this outcome via an analysis exercise, an essay or an historical inquiry and report. This resource enables systematic coverage of the key knowledge and skills, allowing students to springboard into further research.

Overview

The period immediately after World War Two saw Australia undergo a significant transformation. The baby boom and the ‘populate or perish’ immigration policy led to a massive increase in the nation’s population. Economically, there was high employment as industry boomed and international trade emerged. Socially, opportunities opened up in education and gender equality began to be addressed. Culturally, the Australian community became more ethnically diverse, while traditional and conservative Western attitudes regarding human rights and race slowly receded.

This multitude of factors therefore contributed to, and reflected, a climate of change in Australia over the last third of the twentieth century. Sometimes change was affected by economic forces, sometimes by individual and group pressure and sometimes by political influence.

By the 1960s, diverse groups of people were seeking significant changes concerning various aspects of Australian society. People expressed demands concerning Australia’s role in the Vietnam War, Aboriginal land rights, the rights of women, immigration issues and the insular nature of the economy. It is these five areas that have been identified for examination as the *Voices for Change*.

Australia’s role in the Vietnam War became increasingly controversial as the 1960s progressed. Initially seen as reflecting a minority view, the protest movement strengthened to draw in a wide cross-section of the community who were demanding change as Western involvement in Vietnam became more controversial.

The issue of Aboriginal land rights similarly gained increased public support during the period in question. Changes in

legislation were demanded by demonstrative protests and were also sought and achieved through the court system.

The post-war decades saw additional pressure for changes in relation to gender issues. Equality for women - in areas such as education, employment opportunities and pay – was a key voice for change from the mid-1960s in this respect. Women’s aspirations were further enhanced as change was achieved.

Immigration patterns also changed from a predominantly British and continental European intake after the war to a broader entry of groups from Asia and Africa in the later decades of the century. The death of the White Australia Policy and the birth of multiculturalism changed the composition, culture and attitudes of the population.

It is these four areas that will be closely examined in the coming chapters as significant *Voices for Change* in the period 1965 to 2000.

Topic 1:

Australia's Involvement in the Vietnam War

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The Vietnam War dates from 1955 when conflict broke out between the communist North Vietnam and the anti-communist South Vietnam government after the end of colonial French rule. The war continued until the fall of Saigon and hence victory to the North Vietnamese forces in 1975. The North Vietnamese army was supported by communist allies (including USSR and China), while South Vietnam was predominantly supported by the USA and also by other anti-communist allies including South Korea and Australia. The war escalated from the early 1960s when the USA's presence multiplied with its determination to enforce its containment policy and prevent the spread of communism.

Despite its massive commitment to ground forces and weapons, the USA could not match the guerrilla tactics of the North Vietnamese Vietcong forces. Casualty rates of largely-

conscripted US troops continued to escalate and combined with the lack of military success, the American involvement became increasingly questioned both within government and throughout the population. By the late 1960s, the public protest movement against the Vietnam War had reached a crescendo. Although fighting continued, it became increasingly apparent that the war could not be won and US ground forces were gradually withdrawn. US military involvement formally ended in 1973, with nearly 60,000 troops killed or missing. Estimates of Vietnamese deaths are as high as four million.

Australia's involvement as a United States ally in the Vietnam War began in 1962 with the commitment of 30 military advisors to South Vietnam. Over the next decade, more than 50,000 Australians - many of whom were conscripts - served in Vietnam of which 521 personnel were killed. The last Australians left Vietnam at the end of 1972. As was the case in the USA, Australian involvement in the war became increasingly controversial as the fighting continued. Protests against conscription were widespread and peace movements emerged around the nation. Moratorium marches saw a large cross-section of the population voicing their opposition to involvement in the Vietnam War. In the 1972 Federal election, the issue was a major factor in the federal election of Gough Whitlam and the Australian Labor Party after 22 years of conservative rule.

The Demands for Change

Anti-Conscription and the Draft Resistance Movements

Conscription was introduced by the Menzies Liberal-Country Party government in November 1964. Under the National Service Scheme, 20-year-old men were required to register and then be subject to a biannual 'birthday ballot'. If their

birth date was drawn from a barrel, then they may be required to undertake two years of army service. From 1966, this service could include combat duties in Vietnam.

Until the Whitlam Labor Government suspended the scheme immediately upon election in December 1972, just over 800,000 20-year-olds had registered for National Service. Of this number, around 63,000 were called up to join the army and 15,381 conscripts served in Vietnam – of whom some 200 were killed.

University students were allowed to defer their national service until the end of their courses, which provided one means of avoiding call-up. Conscientious objectors presented arguments in court based around pacifist beliefs, religious opposition to wars or moral opposition to the Vietnam War in particular – with varying degrees of success depending on the case and the magistrate.

There was resistance to conscription from the start of the scheme, but the anti-conscription movement gained momentum with the death of Errol Noack – the first draftee to be killed in action just 11 days after arriving in Vietnam in May 1966. His death became the symbol of a growing anti-war movement in Australia.

With individuals expressing their protests against conscription, these single voices gradually joined various groups that evolved as part of the broad anti-war movement. Some of these organisations soon became significant voices for change. Save Our Sons (SOS) was comprised largely of middle-class women, while the Youth Campaign Against Conscription was a younger demographic movement.

For those young men under threat of the draft consequences, however, the scheme meant more than just principles. As more Australians were killed in Vietnam, conscription now also had potentially fatal consequences. Some men refused to