

# Timeline of Australian history and impacts on Aboriginal peoples

01

## 60,000+ years pre-colonisation

- Aboriginal people lived in small family groups - shared language, cultural protocols and knowledges. They moved around a defined territory with seasonal changes.
- Many family groups (up to 500 people) would come together for social, ceremonial and trade purposes.

02

## 1788-1890s: Invasion, colonisation and resistance

- Aboriginal land was taken over by British colonists on the premise of *Terra Nullius* (land belonging to no one). No treaty was made with any Aboriginal people.
- Many Aboriginal people died as a result of frontier conflicts, introduced diseases, random killings and organised massacres. People were dehumanised by the colonisers in order to justify the horrific acts against them.
- Extensive cultural knowledge was lost as entire generations of family groups were murdered.

03

## 1890s-1940s: Protection and segregation

- Laws were in place to control relations between Aboriginal people and settlers, removing basic freedoms in relation to movement, labour, custody of children and personal property.
- Survivors of frontier conflicts were moved onto reserves or missions, away from traditional Country. Children were removed for 'training'.
- Many Aboriginal people were forced to work on missions, cattle stations and as domestic helpers and were not paid for their labour, perpetuating the disadvantage across generations and mistrust of institutions.

04

## 1940s-1960s: Assimilation

- The Commonwealth Government agreed that Aboriginal people 'not of full blood' should be absorbed (assimilated) into the wider population with the view that the 'Aboriginal problem' would disappear as people lost connection to their cultural identity.
- Exemption certificates 'dog licenses' were issued to Aboriginal people who gave up connections to culture, language, customs and community. This allowed them freedoms to vote, work and attend school.
- Assimilation policies impacted harshly on Aboriginal people and many still suffer as a result of trauma experienced in institutions, displacement from land and family, intergenerational poverty related to poor nutrition, and inadequate education and healthcare.

05

## 1967-Present: Integration and reconciliation

- The 1967 Referendum granted Aboriginal peoples the right of citizenship and they were counted in census data.
- Self-determination and self-management approaches to Indigenous affairs were used throughout the 1980s.
- The process of reconciliation started in 1991. Despite many promises, consultations and reports, progress is slow.
- The 2023 *Australian Indigenous Voice Referendum*, based on the Uluru Statement from the Heart, was rejected.
- Focus changed to treaty processes at state / territory levels. For updates go to [ANTAR](#) website.