

Assimilation Policy

1950s – 1960s

Other Names: • Absorption

Details

The assimilation policy was a policy of absorbing Aboriginal people into white society through the process of removing children from their families. The ultimate intent of this policy was the destruction of Aboriginal society. When Aboriginal Protection authorities around Australia adopted assimilation as a policy, there was a substantial increase in the already established practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families. Children were placed in institutions where they could be ‘trained’ to take their place in white society.

The term assimilation was used officially in reference to Aboriginal people from the 1950s, borrowed from the immigration policies that shared the goal of a culturally and racially homogenous white Australia.

A document produced following the Native Welfare Conference in January 1961 contained this definition of the meaning of the policy of assimilation:

The policy of assimilation means in the view of all Australian governments that all aborigines and part-aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties of other Australians. Thus, any special measures taken for aborigines and part-aborigines are regarded as temporary measures not based on colour but intended to meet their need for special care and assistance to protect them from any ill effects of sudden change and to assist them to make the transition from one stage to another in such a way as will be favourable to their future social, economic and political advancement ('The policy of assimilation', p.1).

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More info

Resources

- [Programmed to be white](#), From Little Things Big Things Grow, No date
- Macintyre, Stuart, *Assimilation*, The Oxford Companion to Australian History, 1998
- Reynolds, Henry, *An Indelible Stain?*, 2001
- Attwood, Bain, *Aboriginal protection*, The Oxford Companion to Australian History, 1998
- Anderson, Warwick, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 2005