

## Content

## Structure

### Question analysis

Because of the campaign therefore White Australia Policy is dead

**Does an examination of the campaign for reconciliation suggest that the racism of the White Australia policy is now a thing of the past?**

Essay question

Examine all possible  
Put forward a main claim  
Support that claim  
see ESSAG p. 12

### Discuss.

**\*Please note inking of ideas is in bold**

The current situation

The campaign for Reconciliation remains today a controversial issue of major national significance and one of which there has been a serious lack of progress made by the Howard government. Many Australians are increasingly frustrated with not only the lack of progress made, but also by the racism shown towards the indigenous population of Australia. **In this essay**

See essay introduction in ESSAG p. 20-21

Research questions

**I ask** firstly how the Howard government has dealt with the campaign for Reconciliation and therefore what progress, if any, has been made, **before I ask** whether this suggests that the racism of 'White Australia' is now a thing of the past. Reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians **is very important if** all Australians are to try to live together in a multi-cultural, non-racist society and fully address the obvious disadvantage of Aborigines.

Rationale– why the topic is important and relevant

It is therefore vital for us, and especially the government, to work towards reconciliation. **The first tasks are** to conceptualise what is meant by the terms 'Reconciliation' and the 'White Australia Policy'. **I will then examine** the ways in which the Howard government has dealt with the process towards reconciliation by discussing moves such as the refusal to give an apology to the stolen generations, the derailment of the native title act, and the abolition of ATSIC, to demonstrate that in fact the racism of 'White Australia' is not a thing of the

Stages of the essay– outline of the main points

Main claim– authors position

Definition of reconciliation (general)

past and is in fact part of government policy.  
When referring specifically to reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, **many have attempted to define it**. Boreham, Stokes and Hall (2004, p.5) argue that the term reconciliation recognises and acknowledges a need for a formal resolution of differences between the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of Australia. Reconciliation Australia (2004) **goes into more depth** and states that reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians 'is about finding new and better ways of tackling problems and of connecting with one another', through healing, justice and recognition of past injustices, so that the disadvantage experienced by indigenous Australians can be addressed.

Conceptual/theoretical paragraphs ESSAG p.21

Definition of reconciliation (specific to topic)

History of reconciliation in Australia  
Establish the past in order to argue the essay question

The idea of Aboriginal reconciliation **has been around since the 1960s**, but the actual process of reconciliation is relatively new. According to The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (1993, p.3) 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples and their supporters have used the word reconciliation since at least the 1960s, as they have worked for recognition and social justice'. However, Boreham, Stokes and Hall (2004, p.5) note that 'the current extensive process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal people was instigated by a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991'. **In this essay I will use the definition** put forward by Reconciliation Australia, as they are a recognised body set up for the purpose of assisting with the reconciliation process.

Conceptual/theoretical paragraphs (continued)

Selection of definition and reason for choice

Explain White Australia Policy

**It is also important to look at** the White Australia Policy in order to determine whether the racism of this policy is now a thing of the past or whether it still exists today. In 1901 the Australian Government enacted an immigration policy, known as the White Australia Policy, supported by all political parties of the time, to regulate and control the number and types of people entering Australia (Bessant and Watts,

Conceptual/theoretical paragraphs (continued)

Evaluate policy

2002, p.276). **This policy was ruthless:** while it encouraged immigration from Britain, **it excluded** all immigration by 'Asians' or 'Coloureds', with the objective of building a White Australia (Bessant and Watts, 2002, p.217). Unfortunately this did not mean that the indigenous population, whom the Europeans called 'Aborigines', were unaffected by the White Australia policy. **In fact** they were very much disadvantaged by it and discriminated against as a result of it.

Conceptual/theoretical paragraphs (continued)

Rationale for policy



Racism inherent in policy



Evidence

Although already living in Australia, the black indigenous population had no status as Australian citizens until 1968, meaning that before this date they were unable to vote, own property and were not even included as part of the Australian population when it came to census time (Bessant and Watts, 2002, p.225). **The rationale of** the white 'European' policy makers was extremely racist, because they viewed the black race as savages and the most inferior race of all. Boreham, Stokes and Hall (2004, p.374) similarly point out that the rationale for this policy **was based on the racist belief** that 'non-Europeans were too poor and ignorant to assimilate to Australian democratic standards and that they were likely to be used to undercut conditions'. **Racist attitudes like these** led to the removal of large numbers of Aboriginal children from their parents who were placed into white families, known now as the Stolen Generation. **It was also these racist attitudes** that caused the cultural and spiritual dispossession of many Aboriginal people. **And it was racist attitudes** that saw the dramatic reduction in the health and numbers of the Aboriginal population (Bessant and Watts, pp.23-24). The government did not begin to dismantle the White Australia policy until 1965 and it took another seven years to finally be discarded (Boreham, Stokes and Hall, 2003, p.374).

Parallel structure to build evidence and create a picture

Research question- does racism exist today?

**However, there has been much recent criticism** that the racism of this policy still exists today, and is still ingrained in our society. It can be seen by looking at the status of the Aboriginal population today, and in the current government's

Research question

Yes- Bessant & Watts 2002	handling of the reconciliation process which is supposed to address the past injustices and disadvantages caused by the White Australia Policy. Bessant and Watts (2003, p.217) argue
We should evaluate/ assess Bessant & Watts' claim	that 'the legacies of colonialism and racism have yet to be adequately resolved' and therefore while Australia may claim to be a multicultural society in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century, 'racist habits of
Specific research?? Does the reconciliation process address	mind continue to make their presence felt' (Bessant and Watts, 2003, p.217). <b>Thus we need</b> to examine the current process of Reconciliation and the way the Howard Government is approaching it, to assess the validity of claims such as this.
Current Government attitude to reconciliation- 'practical'	<b>Since gaining office</b> in 1996, the Howard government has never been comfortable with or keen on the reconciliation process (Farlay, 2000, p. 111), and the quest for reconciliation seems to be fading away. This government has <b>taken a new direction</b> in the process of reconciliation, a direction quite different to the one mapped out by the Keating Labor Government. It is termed Practical Reconciliation. The government has described its aim as improving living conditions for Aboriginal people through practical policy
Argument/ claim  Symbolic gestures are valuable eg saying 'sorry' to 'Stolen Generations' -explain this group	making and solutions, dismissing the earlier process as merely making <b>symbolic gestures</b> , apologies and promises (Bennett, 1999, p.36). The Howard government's lack of regard for the importance of <b>symbolic gestures</b> and promises <b>is clearly demonstrated</b> in the Prime Minister's refusal to give a national apology to the Stolen Generations. Between the late 19 <sup>th</sup> century and the late 1960s, large numbers of children were removed from their Aboriginal families and placed into special institutions or white families, as part of 'welfare interventions' under the White Australia policy. Its purpose was to 'train' out the Aboriginality of mixed descent children, known as the Stolen Generations (Bessant and Watts, 2002, p.224). <b>This is an extreme injustice committed against</b> the Aboriginal people, <b>but one that</b> many have tried to justify, including Prime Minister John Howard. Bessant and Watts reflect that "racism remains the most shocking aspect in this story of the 'Stolen
Evaluation	

Generations" (2002, p.224).

Public support for  
'symbolic  
gestures'

Contrast with  
government atti-  
tude

**One of the aims of** reconciliation is to heal, a process that requires recognition of past injustices committed against Aborigines (Reconciliation Australia, 2004). The healing process begins with a national apology to the Stolen Generations, public recognition that the removal of thousands of Aboriginal children by white people was wrong. This impetus for an official national apology has become one of the major focal points of reconciliation, most notably since the release of the HREOC Bringing Them Home Report in 1996 (Kalantzis and Cope, 2001, p. 138). Less than one year after the release of the report, in 1997, blank books called Sorry Books appeared in Australian libraries to allow Australians to make personal apologies to the Stolen Generations (de Costa, 2002, p.401). **Despite the fact that** the desire to say 'sorry' was acted on by millions of non-indigenous Australians, the Prime Minister John Howard refused to issue a national apology to the Stolen Generations at the Australian Reconciliation Convention in May 1997. He claimed that reconciliation could not work if it placed a higher value on symbolic gestures than on practical needs of Aborigines (Bennett, 1999, p.36). **Unfortunately** than this and attacked findings made in the HREOC Bringing Them Home Report, by discrediting HREOC's research methods and the credibility of one of its authors (de Costa, 2002, p.403). With full knowledge of the importance of this apology to both the Aboriginal people and many in the Australian community, the government still refused to issue a national apology to the Stolen Generations, and **therefore** to acknowledge 'non-indigenous people's culpability in committing injustices against Indigenous people' (Kalantzis and Cope, 2001, p. 138), not to mention the detrimental effects these injustices still have on the Aboriginal community today. **Not only did** the Howard government respond to the HREOC report defensively, mean-spiritedly and with a racist attitude,

**Sub- claim**  
Argument -  
the  
Howard  
government  
is not obey-  
ing the will  
of the peo-  
ple.

**but in doing so** and refusing to apologise, it showed a lack of support for truly achieving reconciliation and a lack of leadership for all Australians. **Is it not** the responsibility for a government, who claims to govern for all Australians, to deliver an apology (Beazley, 2000, pg.181) if it is what indigenous Australians and many non-indigenous Australians overwhelmingly want? Former Chair of ATSIC Lowitja O'Donoghue has suggested that 'there can be no reconciliation while [Howard] refuses to apologise on behalf of the nation for the removal of children' (de Costa, 2002, p.404). Given the way it deals with Aboriginal issues and the process for reconciliation, it is obvious that the Howard Government shows racism toward Indigenous Australians similar to that which was present under the White Australia Policy.

Rhetorical question used to persuade the reader to accept the writer's claim

Claim:  
Legislative attack  
British policy of  
'Terra nullius'



The role of  
Reconciliation



Wik

**Since the time of** British colonisation of Australia, the Aboriginal people have been physically, culturally and spiritually dispossessed of their land, because upon settlement there was no recognition by the Crown of any form Indigenous ownership of the land, and instead the land was regarded as un-inhabited, or known as *terra nullius* (Boreham, Stokes and Hall, 2004, p.63). **This idea of terra nullius** continued throughout Federation and the development of the White Australia Policy, when many Aboriginal people were removed from their traditional land and placed into missions or onto reserves (Boreham, Stokes and Hall, 2004, p.63). **In 1992**, the High Court of Australia's decision on the *Mabo* case and later the *Wik* case, finally recognised Aborigine's prior occupation of this country and declared that the land was in fact not *terra nullius* and that Aboriginal land rights may still exist (Beazley, 2000; Boreham, Stokes and Hall, 2004; Bessant and Watts, 2002). The dispossession of land is one of the many great injustices that the Aboriginal people have been subjected to in the past, and one that the Reconciliation

Attempt at Wik reversal by the Howard government -strategies

process should acknowledge and make reparations for in order to overcome the disadvantage to Aborigines that this has caused (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000).

**Therefore**, as many have argued, 'the relationship of native title to reconciliation is crucial' (de Costa, 2002, p.398).

The Howard Government, **however**, does not see it this way. The *Wik* decision had the potential to be a major instrument of Reconciliation (Beazley, 2000, p.179) and the point at which Reconciliation should have taken on a more tangible role (de Costa, 2002, p.400), **but instead** the Howard government set out to reverse the *Wik* decision and destroy the intent of the Native Title Act, passed following the *Mabo* decision. This clearly showed its bias in protecting the rights of farmers and pastoralists rather the rights of Aborigines.

a. Create hostility towards the court

This government carried out its racist agenda against the *Wik* decision in many ways. **Firstly**, it rallied against the decision itself, calling it regrettable (de Costa, 2002, p.398) and portraying the High Court judges as 'idle, leftwing dreamers' (Manne, 2001), accusing them of 'judicial activism' (de Costa, 2002, p.398). This created much public hostility towards the Court. **Secondly**, Prime Minister John Howard and Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer held up a map on national television that showed how 70% of Australian land was under threat of native title claims. This behaviour set the tone for the National Farmers Federation (NFF) fear campaign (de Costa, 2002, p.399).

b. Fear campaign aimed at farmers

c. New legislation

**Thirdly**, the Howard government introduced Native Title Amendment legislation into parliament, which was passed in May 1998, without the support of any significant indigenous leader. The amendment meant that native title would be heavily regulated, and more easily extinguished at the government's discretion (de Costa, 2002, p.399).

This legislation clearly showed the Howard government's preference to protect the rights of liberal/

Racist?  
Why?

national part-voting farmers. **While promoting this legislation**, the PM promised significant extinguishment of native title rights and 'indicated that as part of the legislative response to *Wik*, the Racial Discrimination Act was not sacrosanct, implying that it may be open season on indigenous people and their rights in order to re-establish "certainty of title" to pastoralists' (de Costa, 2002, p.399). **Considering all of this, it is obvious that** the Howard Government's approach to Native Title was and is racist, reviving the idea that the white race is superior to the black indigenous race, and therefore that white people's rights come before and should be protected over Aboriginal rights, an idea that was dominant in the development and implementation of the White Australia policy.

Authority support  
for view = UN

In the case of native title, the Howard government has shown itself to be racially discriminatory in the creation of the Native Title Amendment Act. The act itself has been found to be inconsistent with Australia's obligations as a signatory to the UN Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Beazley, 2000, p. 179). The government **could have used** the *Wik* decision as a fundamental step in furthering the process of reconciliation, to help undo the past injustices experienced by Aborigines because of *terra nullius*. **Instead** it chose to promote more inequality and racism rather than continue the progress on reconciliation that had been made by governments before it. Under this government the quest for reconciliation has almost disappeared. Some would even argue that the process has taken a huge step backwards.

Claim:  
Indigenous  
institutions

ATSIC



**Since its time in power**, the Howard government has deliberately gone about suffocating political institutions that advocate for a progressive reconciliation process. **Firstly**, on the 15 April 2004, the government



announced its plans to abolish ATSIC, the elected Aboriginal representative body, created in 1989 (Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination, 2004). ATSIC was designed to give Indigenous Australians an avenue for democratic representation; for making, implementing and administering Indigenous affairs policy; and for advising the Commonwealth on indigenous affairs. In effect ATSIC allowed for some form of self-determination for Aboriginal people (Boreham, Stokes and Hall, 2004, p.65). In this representative role, ATSIC strongly supported a progressive view of reconciliation. And yet the Howard Government did not respect or respond to this form of Aboriginal representation and so upon abolishing ATSIC in 2005, it established a new body, ATSIS, to take over the administrative role of ATSIC (Boreham, Stokes and Hall, 2004,p.65). However this new body has no Aboriginal people within it. The Howard government **also** introduced legislation in 2003 which sought to reduce the power and authority of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC), 'replacing the existing specialist commissioners (including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner) with three generalist commissioners with no specific portfolios' (Boreham, Stokes and Hall, 2004, pp.6). By abolishing the Aboriginal representative body ATSIC and weakening the powers of HREOC, two institutions that worked to protect and represent the rights of Aboriginal people, the Howard government is actively working to silence the Aboriginal population of Australia by taking away their political voice. Boreham, Stokes and Hall (2004, p.66) argue that 'the rhetoric and policies of the Howard government have marked a return to a more paternalistic and assimilationist approach to Indigenous issues', not unlike that of the White Australia Policy.

ATSIS



Discriminatory

Loss of voice

**Conclusion**

\*Popular support for reconciliation

\*Howard government destroys reconciliation—parallel between current government approach and White Australia policy

Although many Australians are keen on the

So ... to answer the question  
- summarise key points

1.No apology

2.No land rights or native title

3.Abolition of ATSIC

Racism is **not** a thing of the past

process of reconciliation, with 81% of Australians believing it is important (Beazley, 2000, p.180), our government, unfortunately, is not. The Howard government has in fact brought the process to a halt, revealing its racist side and obvious unwillingness to accommodate the rights and needs of Indigenous Australians. In doing so, it has revealed an attitude and approach to Indigenous issues similar to the ones held by governments and policy-makers under the White Australia Policy. Under this policy Aboriginal people were subject to great racial discrimination and injustices, had no land rights, were regarded as the inferior race to the white race and therefore not deserving of equal rights, were removed from their families and had no political voice, all because they were not regarded as Australian citizens. The reconciliation process is designed to heal and overcome issues and injustices arising out of the White Australia period. However, the Howard government has refused to begin the healing process by refusing to give a national apology to the Stolen Generations, by protecting pastoralist rights over Indigenous rights to native title, and by silencing the Aboriginal political voice in the abolition of ATSIC. The Howard Government is clearly neither comfortable with nor supportive of the reconciliation process, and, as shown in this essay, is also very racist in its approach. Clearly the racism of the White Australia Policy is not a thing of the past.

## **References:**

Australia Reconciliation Unit. 2003. *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation: an introduction*. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Beazley, K. 2000. Unfinished Business. In *'Essays on Australian Reconciliation'*. Edited by Grattan, M. Bookman Press Pty Ltd. Melbourne.

Bennett, S. 1999. *White Politics and Black Australia*. Allen and Unwin, NSW.

Bessant, J. and Watts, R. 2002. *Sociology Australia*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Allen and Unwin, NSW.

Boreham, P., Stokes, G. & Hall, R. 2004. *The Politics of Australian Society*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Pearson Education Australia, NSW.

Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Australia. 2000. *Reconciliation: Australia's challenge: final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Parliament*. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Canberra.

De Costa, R. 2002. Reconciliation as Abdication. In *'Australian Journal of Social Issues'*. November 2002, Vol 36, No. 4.

Farlay, R. 2000. What's the Alternative?. In *'Essays on Australian Reconciliation'*. Edited by Grattan, M. Bookman Press Pty Ltd. Melbourne.

Kalantzis, M. and Cope, B. 2001. *Reconciliation, Multiculturalism, Identities*. Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd.

Manne, R. 2001. *The Barren Years*. The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne.

Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination. 2004. *New Arrangements in Indigenous Affairs*. Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra.

Reconciliation Australia, 2004. *About Us*. <http://www.reconciliation.orq.au/aboutus/whatis.html> [02/05/2005]