



A Concise History of Australia

Stuart Macintyre

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This revised edition of a comprehensive single-volume Australian history reference incorporates the most recent historical research and contemporary debate on relevant issues. In addition to frontier violence between European settlers and Aborigines and the Stolen Generations, the volume covers the Sydney Olympics, the refugee crisis and the "Pacific solution."

A Concise History of Australia Details

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Emilly Gorsky says

If you've got a bit of time to skim through Australian history this book is a good start. It doesn't delve into the specifics of war or the Stolen Generations but it provides a general and concise overview of the events that took place from the beginning of European settlement until 2004 (the edition I read is slightly dated). I was personally really interested in the development of our own currency and the influential Australians who are featured on the notes but unfortunately this was not included in the book.

Bill says

A good introduction to Australian history. Not exactly a page turner, but quite readable as history goes. Worth the effort if you'd like to reflect a bit more deeply about how Australia came to be the country it is today.

Rachel Willis says

While this book does provide an interesting overview of Australian history, it tends to drag. The writing is dull.

Jana says

It is really good book. As the title says, it's concise, it gives you all the info that you need to know, and eventually you will learn a lot about this young continent. Enjoyable read.

Wes Pue says

Great book

David Sarkies says

A more liberal view of Australian history

13 November 2011

My previous arguments with relation to history books really do not apply with Australia. From my memories of my school days Australia did not have a history prior to 1788 (the year the first fleet arrived in Sydney

Harbour). Okay, a couple of explorers stumbled across the country, but all they saw was lots of rocks, desert, and low lying trees, so they wrote it off as uninhabitable. It was only when Captain Cook arrived off of Sydney Harbour (more precisely Botany Bay) in 1770 that they decided that the country was worth colonising. Prior to that Australia had no history (or so people were concerned).

However that is incorrect, and this book does try to address this inaccuracy. Some would say that it is taking a reinterpretive view of history, but I disagree namely because the original history of Australia failed to take into account the thriving nations of indigenous Australians that lived here prior to our arrival. Granted the aboriginals may not have lived in cities but that does not mean they are any less human. In fact, up until recently Aboriginals were treated pretty much like orcs are treated in a Dungeons and Dragons campaign. That is as a bunch of barbarous sub-humans that it is okay to kill because the laws of murder do not apply to them.

This, obviously, is not the case. The Aboriginals had a complex political system of nations that stretched right across the country. While the aboriginals did not live in cities, they had their own territories separated by borders which they did not cross, and a sophisticated system of diplomatic relations (such as a visitor standing on the border until they were invited in). They also had a complex legal system as well as a deep cultural heritage. The difference is that they had no recorded history like we have, but there was no need. Life pretty much went on the same as it had been going on for thousands of years. Everything they needed was produced by the land, but if they needed something better they would invent it. While they did not have farms, they did farm the land by planting and harvesting crops as needed, and while they did not fence off paddocks, they did graze the wildlife in the region.

However, from 1789 to the present day I still suggest that Australia has no history in the sense that European Nation states (or even the United States) have. Australia is pretty much an extension of British sovereignty, and since its slow separation from the Crown, it has now entered an era where the region dominates and not the country, though there is still a struggle between Australia's British Heritage and its new Asian identity. 'We are not Asian', we White Australians say, 'and because we are not Asian we are not apart of Asia, we are our own'.

Australian history is thus pretty much a history of expanding colonialism. We do not care about, and in fact ignore, the wars against the Aboriginals (what? There were wars with the Aboriginals? I thought they simply submitted). Well, that may be the case, but it was what they call peace through superior firepower. There were some incidents of Aboriginals launching guerrilla raids against British farms, but they were generally isolated events. The fact is, when the Australians first colonised a region, the first thing they would do would be to gun down the inhabitants, and those that were left were either enslaved or fled inland. Now what we have is an underclass of Aboriginals living in our cities, and another underclass living in uninhabitable lands in central Australia (much the same as the story of colonialism in the United States).

I still think that there is a lot of rewriting of history even today. One prominent church in Australia likes to boast of its evangelical heritage that dates back to the the founding of the colonies. However a religion that preaches peace and goodwill to all men, and that we are all equal under God, that participates in such wholesale slaughter of Aboriginals cannot be that evangelical (how indeed can a pastor of an evangelical church step back and do nothing while innocents are gunned down simply because they want the land). Granted, I was not there when that happened, so I really can't speak for the pastor at the time, but I find that the statement is one of those statements that has the potential of white-washing some bloody, and uncomfortable, period of our history.

Look, I liked this book because it tried to take a different view of Australian history. This was a history of class warfare (which was being mimicked in the United Kingdom) and this warfare has broken out into bloody battles such as the Eureka Stockade and the mass protests at the turn of both the 19th and 20th Centuries. While we Australians have been handed our prosperity on a plate, we are not necessarily complacent about it. As with the Workplaces Reforms that the last Liberal Government tried to implement we saw a huge reaction from the working people (which, ironically, has not manifested out of the Carbon Tax). However, the corporate rulers of our country use their power to attempt to influence our thoughts as

well, and while I believe the Carbon Tax is a poorly implemented law, it is a necessary step in attempting to reign in unbridled pollution. Workchoices was simply a way of increasing the power of corporate Australia at the expense of the average worker.

Anne Turnley says

I was hoping for a brief history. This is more than that. Very heavy on the political scene and author's bias is not hidden. Still got what I needed with some scanning.

J.M. Hushour says

"He just smiled and gave me a Vegemite sandwich."

With, as always, a stress on the 'concise', Macintyre's effort is fair-to-middling. As with many histories, it starts out strong, juggling both the European and Indigenous narratives (with a perhaps unflattering emphasis on the former), but peters out post-WWII when the narrative becomes a slack-jawed, eye-blearing exploration of economic policy. Yawn.

Prior to that, it's fine. The section on the long 19th century down under is probably the best part and is the meat of the book. There is virtually nothing on culture, which is astounding, since that is one of Australia's strong points: how you write a history of Australia without mentioning Paul Hogan, Foster's, or Midnight Oil is beyond me.

katie says

I don't have much to say about this. It's pretty straightforward. I'm not really interested in history in concise form (it's the little details I want!) but it did the job.

Sannie Hald says

Chapter 2.
