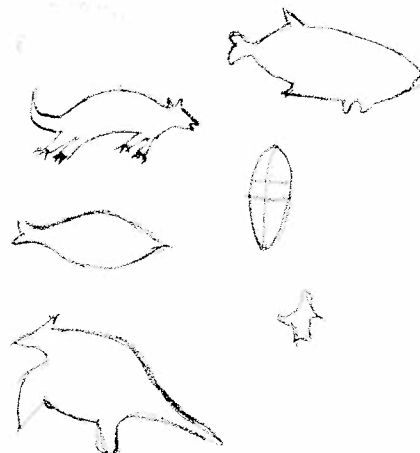


The initial contact between white and black Australia was disastrous for Aboriginal people. Smallpox, colds, flu and measles were fatal ailments to Aboriginal people who had no resistance to such introduced diseases. Burial ceremonies of the local Aboriginal people had also been destroyed. Bodies were found floating in the harbour and lying in rock shelters, because there were no longer people alive or well enough to carry out the burial practices, while others had made their way out of the Sydney region to escape the threat to their own lives. When Governor King arrived in 1800, he initiated the policy that settlers could fire on any 'native' they saw.

Phillip and the governors who followed, Hunter and King, all described their daily life in journals, but failed to obtain any information about Aboriginal peoples' social and religious life. In this way the colonists failed to understand that although Aborigines didn't believe in the white man's 'God', they did have their own 'Supreme Beings' with sandstone and rock drawings demonstrating their religious beliefs.

The colonists' ignorance of Aboriginal beliefs continued throughout the nineteenth century. In his address to the Geographical Society of Australasia in 1883, John Mann said of these engravings: "The so-called rock carvings are merely outline representations of men, fish, animals, etc... A flat rock near the Association Ground, Sydney Common, was covered with the representations of kangaroo, opossum, fish, boomerangs, etc... No mystery whatever may be attached to these marks. I have seen a young man lying on rock whilst others traced his outline and then picked out the line with a tomahawk."

(John F Mann, "Notes on the Aborigines of Australia", Geographical Society of Australasia, Proceedings 1, 1883-4 Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.)



The impact of colonisation led to a change in the health and well being of Aboriginal people in much the same way as to any group who have been forcibly removed from their land and traditional lifestyle. These impacts remain evident in urban Koori society and culture today.

Colonizing Australia

The colonization in the history of Australia was very similar to the colonization of the Americas. In addition to settlers who traveled to America voluntarily, governments used the colonies as prisons. Once the American Revolution began in 1776, the English government needed a new place to send its prisoners, since the American colonies would no longer take them. So in 1788, England sent a crew to Australia, then known as New South Wales, and began building prisons. This would mark the beginning of the fall of the Aborigines.



English settlers surrounded by a group of Aborigines. This is believed to be the earliest photograph taken in Australia. The Aborigines have already adopted the English style of dress.

As with the American Indians, the English forced the Aborigines off their land. Many were beaten and killed. Others contracted diseases that were foreign to them. Their immune systems couldn't fight these illnesses off, and many people died. Starvation became a major problem -- the Aborigines could no longer roam the land where they found their food, and many tribes died out completely.

The English forced many of those who weren't killed into slavery. Women and children did everything from gathering food to cleaning. Many women were also kept as sex slaves.

When the English arrived in 1788, the number of Aborigines

was in the hundreds of thousands and possibly into the millions. With the death that followed the arrival of the English, the numbers of Aborigines dwindled drastically until there was almost no one left.

Unfortunately, over the next centuries things got worse before they got better. Besides losing hundreds of thousands of lives, the Aborigines also lost much of their culture. They could no longer tell their stories and traditions, and in some

cases, there was no one to hear them. History was lost. At the time of colonization, Aborigines spoke an estimated 250-300 different languages [source: Contemporary Review]. More than half of these have disappeared altogether.

Then, in the early part of the 20th century, **non-Indigenous Australians** (anyone not an Aborigine) decided the only way to save the Aborigines was to assimilate them to the white-Australian way of life.



Aborigines offer a group of English visitors a ride in their boat, circa 1870. Not all relations between the two groups were this friendly.