



Assimilation and discrimination

Charles Duiguid

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In the *Assimilation Period* from 1930s to 1960s government introduced policies to control the lives of Aboriginal people. The extracts below show examples of how this act of discrimination impacted on Aboriginal people.

1951 Fred Waters, a literate, grey-haired Aboriginal townsman, for initiating a strike in protest against conditions at Bagot Native Reserve on the outskirts of Darwin, was arrested and banished to Haast Bluff 1200 miles distant. No charge was ever brought against him.
Personal record

1952 In December 1952, Des Parfit, a returned soldier in uniform, with Korean war service ribbons on, was refused a meal at a country cafe because of his being an Aboriginal.
Personal record

1953 In October 1953, the same man had booked rooms in Perth for his honeymoon. They were cancelled when it was seen that he and his wife were Aborigines. With the help of a white lady, other boarding houses were approached, but without success. In great disappointment the young couple had to return home.
Daily News, 24 October 1953

Twenty-two Aboriginal people were arrested on a Sunday, and were charged next day with being in a prohibited area. They had been sitting down in a former tribal ground half a mile from Katherine township. They were convicted and fined. It was an offence for Aboriginal people to be outside their employer's gate and within one mile of the township after dark and on holidays.

The News, Adelaide, 28 April 1953



1955 Early in this year a mission for half-caste children at Oodnadatta in South Australia applied for admission of its children to the local public school. Following vigorous protests from a number of white people an inspector was sent to investigate. The application was refused, but the following year the State Education Department ruled that Aboriginal children if clean and tidy could attend school. This allowed mission children to attend but excluded camp children who, without housing, cannot meet the requirements. Houses have not yet been built.

The Mail, Adelaide, 17 March 1956

At Moree, New South Wales, Aboriginal people and part-Aboriginal people were banned from swimming in the town pool and from using municipal buildings.

The Advertiser, 13 June 1955

1956 A hotel keeper in Pinjarra, Western Australia refused to admit an Aboriginal Methodist Mission Sister who was booked in with the Superintendent, a Methodist Minister.

The Age, Melbourne, 31 August 1957

1958 The Town Council of Kempsey, New South Wales, placed a colour bar on its swimming pool although the Aboriginal people were members of the Surf Club. Wauchope, a nearby town, invited the men to use its pool and to swim at its carnival.

The News, Adelaide, 21 January 1958

Several residents of Drouin, forty-six miles from Melbourne, protested against (an Aborigine) family taking a house in the town.

The Advertiser, 24 September 1958

A picture theatre owner at Pialba 188 miles north of Brisbane, admitted that she segregated Aboriginal patrons from whites.

The News, 14 October 1958

Twenty-six white people signed a petition to Nambucca Shire Council, New South Wales, protesting against the sale of a house to an Aboriginal family although they enjoyed full citizenship rights. The family mixed freely with the townsfolk; the man was in regular employment and paid income tax. He was also stalwart in Rugby League football. The action created public resentment and, when the house in question was sold to a local baker, the Aboriginal family was encouraged and helped with the purchase of a nearby block for building on.

The Advertiser, 23 August 1958

1959 A charming full-blood girl of eleven years, an ex-patient of the Children's Hospital, Adelaide, and a frequent guest in our home, was to return north with a white mother and her three young children. At a railway junction ticket office the mother was refused a booking in a Commonwealth Railway second class sleeper for the Aboriginal girl.

The mother phoned me. I reported the matter to railway headquarters and sleepers for all were provided — but only after a week's delay.

Personal record



1961 In January 1961, Aboriginal people at Woodenbong, New South Wales, accused white citizens of wholesale discrimination against them. A much respected Aboriginal man who ran a modern hire car was interviewed and stated that his people were looked at askance in cafes and picture theatres, where they had to sit apart. The local policeman started a wonderful youth club. "It was to have had both coloured and white children and it did to start with. But then the whites decided to take their children out of the club unless our coloured youngsters left it; so our children had to go."

The Advertiser, 4 January 1961

In August 1961, two Aboriginal trainee teachers and two New Guinea natives, one of them a member of the Legislative Council, were refused accommodation at a Brisbane Hotel. "We never take dark people," was the hotel keeper's reply. Arriving in Brisbane to work on exhibits from New Guinea and the Northern Territory at the Brisbane National Show, they were welcomed at the airport by Mr Lavan der Heyden, a Territories Department official, who described the action of the hotel as "shocking".

The Advertiser, 9 August 1961

