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AUSTRALIAN STUDIES Now

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INTRODUCTION



I

AUSTRALIAN STUDIES AS A field of human enquiry seeks to understand the nature of contemporary Australian society and culture, and *Australian Studies Now* introduces to an Indian readership many of the best scholars writing on Australia today. Each essay in *Australian Studies Now* engages with key debates — Australian Studies in India, Reading Australian Literature in India, Visual and Performing Arts, Australia and History, Australia and National Identity, Immigration and Multiculturalism, Australia and Asia, and Sport, Religion and Education. The essays are written in an accessible language and do not presuppose a knowledge of Australia. All of them have been published within the last 10 years and for the most part within the last 5 years. *Australian Studies Now* is therefore not only an introduction to India's cricketing rival and trading partner "Down Under," but it is also an introduction to how Australia is currently being taught and studied.

The federal Commonwealth of Australia was brought into being on 1 January 1901 by an Act of the United Kingdom Parliament, and Australia's British heritage for many years provided the context for the study of Australia. Today, however, Australian Studies recognises the rich and complex history of Australia's Aboriginal heritage and Australian Studies plays a key role in informing the debate about the future reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Australian Studies also recognises that non-indigenous Australia comprises a medley, largely

harmonious, though occasionally discordant, of diverse migrant communities. White Australia has a black immigrant history dating from the arrival of African Americans as convicts in the First Fleet in 1788, and in the 2001 Australian population census 160 different ancestries were recorded. Australian scholars are at the forefront of the study of the multicultural nation.

Understanding present-day Australia necessarily depends on the insights of many different academic disciplines. It is fair to say that the study of Australia fifty years ago was undertaken very largely through consideration of Australia's past and, in particular, through the study of Australian literature and political history. The development of newer disciplines within Arts and Social Sciences, such as cultural studies, sociology, business studies and anthropology, has enabled Australian Studies to produce more nuanced, though also more complex, analyses of Australia. Australian Studies is today fully interdisciplinary and provides an insight into such major topics as gender difference, racism and religious conflict.

Contemporary Australia is experiencing global challenges, such as the movement of refugees, threats to the natural environment, rapidly developing communications technologies and international terrorism. The study of Australia can no longer deal only with what happens within Australia but must, like Australians themselves, take a global perspective. To study Australia today it is necessary to take account of transnational organisations, movements and networks, and the study of Australia's place in the world brings to the forefront Australia's relationship to India as a rapidly developing world power. *Australian Studies Now* therefore pays special attention to Australia's relationship with South Asia, and the collection begins with a section on Australian Studies in India.

II

Most of the essays in this collection have been published in various journals and critical collections. They have been (re)edited here to make them more up-to-date and accessible to the scholars pursuing or interested in Australian studies. Permission given by the following copyright holders and authors is gratefully acknowledged by us.

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