

## 7 Equality and Difference

Since the invasion of Australia by Europeans in 1788, Aboriginals have faced institutionalized inequality in all areas of life. Power and especially authority is limited by their class and the prejudice and discrimination that go with it. Although the problem has improved, Aboriginals still face huge barriers in achieving a standard of life equal to other citizens.

Prejudice is caused by lack of information and false stereotypes. The prejudice society often feels against minority groups like Aboriginals has seen them suppressed financially, socially and culturally.

The power of Aboriginals in modern society is limited by their inadequate representation in media, politics, law and health areas. Without proper representation, the needs of Aboriginals are not voiced and inequality continues. The tribal law

of Aboriginal society holds no authority in European systems of justice. In this way Aboriginal citizens have little power and are disadvantaged by a legal system not suited to their cultural beliefs. This has resulted in alarming facts such as, in Western Australia, Aboriginal juveniles are 48 times more likely to spend time in detention, and all Aboriginal citizens are 21 times more likely to be arrested.

The ~~power~~ power ~~has~~ of Aboriginals in politics has been limited by very low representation in parliament as well as laws built into the structures of society. These institutional barriers such as the fact Aboriginals were not even counted as citizens or able to vote until 1967, effectively prevented Aboriginals from having power in our society. There is a common myth that Australia is



an Egalitarian society - where all citizens are equal regardless of wealth, gender or ethnicity. This is built on the fact there appears to be a common culture - of TV, jeans and sport. By looking at the disadvantages Aboriginals still face today in the 21st century, we can see that Australia is not and never has been Egalitarian. It is an open system of stratification (division of society into a hierarchy of importance) where social mobility is theoretically possible. Aboriginals still face too ~~much~~ many social and economic barriers to be able to move to the upper classes of society.

Education is one way successive generations are limited and remain in what is considered the lower class. Rural Aboriginal communities have little access to adequate schooling and without this jobs are scarce, leading to

future economic inequality. While the national average for completing high school is 77%, the rate for Aboriginals is just 33% and only 2.2% of Aboriginals ever gain a tertiary degree (national average 12.8%.)

Aboriginal youth often suffer learned helplessness from experiencing generations of Aboriginals facing inequality. While force and repression was common in Australia's past, today the subtle means of socialisation is used to maintain inequality.

Discrimination is any acts which limit the opportunities of a particular group. Whether intentional or not, discrimination is present in nearly all areas of life for Aboriginals. Even in health care, Aboriginal people face inequality. While the life expectancy is 15-20 years less for Aboriginals, infant mortality is 3-5 times higher.



At both ends of ~~the~~ life, Aboriginals are suffering more in health care than other Australian citizens.

Flowing for Aboriginals is often very poor as a result of economic inequality. Only 34% of Aboriginal people ~~have~~ have running water in their homes, creating sanitation and health problems. It is part of a tragic ~~state~~<sup>cycle</sup> of inequality that sees Aboriginals with little power or formal authority to change their situations.

Much of the problems with inequality are caused by false stereotypes, ~~per~~ perpetuated by media. The common myth of alcoholism in Aboriginals is a media creation. There is actually a higher proportion of Aboriginals who do not drink at all but chronic overuse by a

minority is concentrated on by media. There is also hysteria over financial benefits given to Aboriginal people. What is less obvious is that these groups rarely access mainstream services like community health centres, <sup>and</sup> Medicare. It is simply that all groups within society have different needs and requirements which must be met in different ways. Although Aboriginals should be treated with respect and equality, they are a different group to mainstream society and have different needs.

The situation of inequality has undoubtedly improved through Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity legislation, National Sorry Day and The UN declaration of human rights. On an individual, group, and national level, inequality is being noted and efforts



are constantly being made to improve Australia's inequality.

Aboriginal people's class and ethnicity and the discriminative prejudice that<sup>3</sup> often attached to it are problems all Australians need to face. Power and authority needs to be largely returned to Aboriginal elders and tribal law and above all the rights and needs of Aboriginals need to be respected.