

school. Then, though the Americans have a great capacity for mis-applying the English language, Australians have an even greater capacity for borrowing half-understood social terms from America and they have started to talk of "integration" of our aborigines. I would not myself bother much about the labels that other people choose to use, except that in this case I think that we may fall into error if we make any analogy between the present condition and future state of the Australian aborigines and those of the American negro and if we see the antithesis in Australia as one between "segregation" and "integration" in the current North American sense of these terms.

"Assimilation" itself is an inexact label. Historically it means a rejection of the old idea of protection and caring for the aborigines as a special class. As recently as twenty years ago the prevailing idea in Australia was that the aborigines were a special class of benighted people, legally placed in a category similar to that of mental defectives, who were doomed by their nature to be always something less than fully human, who were bound to die out, and who had to be protected from exploitation or abuse and who, for reasons of compassion, had to be cared for in special places. They were not like us. They were under protection. The new idea of assimilation was a recognition that they *were* like us or could become like us and that in fact they were moving more and more towards our community and that, for a wide variety of reasons related both to our own sense of what it was right to do and of what it was advantageous to do in a social sense, we should work to help them to become like us and live like us, in the same community. A policy of assimilation means that, if it is successful, the person of aboriginal origin will be the same as any other resident of Australia in the eyes of the law, will go to the same schools, do the same jobs at the same wages, live in the same sort of houses, lead the same sort of life and join in the same recreations and observances as any one else in the Australian community. Because of our basic Australian ideas he will do this by his own will as the life he would naturally lead.

In the long run I think myself that he will also be biologically assimilated and become part of the general infusion that makes up the Australian of the future. This would be integration in the exact and ancient meaning of the term—a making one. You will get the meaning if you think of its true antonym, "disintegration".

I detect, however, in the new fashion for speaking of integration rather inexactly in Australia, an idea of preserving something of the separate cultural identity of the two races. I think there is a rather romantic foundation for this—the same sort of thing which, with all due respect to the tradespeople who benefit, is expressed in the Moomba Festival in Melbourne, in the vogue of Central Australian paintings and in the sale of factory-made koala bears and boomerangs. I would question, however, whether it is anything more than a romantic notion.

We might ask ourselves, concerning the future of the aborigines: Is it certain that they will lose their aboriginal culture? Should deliberate efforts be made to see that they do not lose it?

There is need for them to escape shame over their racial origin but this does not necessarily mean that they have to retain their distinctiveness as aborigines.

There is also a need for the transition to be slow and need to take care that they do not lose one source of vitality before they are sure of another, but this is not necessarily the same as saying that the transition can never be completed.

My own observation, recorded tentatively, is that the loss of any valid and distinctive aboriginal culture is certain in the course of time. The ancient pride can remain—and in fact may grow. Those people of Scottish ancestry who delight in strange capers at Hallowe'en, and those people of Irish origin who whenever they do something fine exclaim "It must be my Irish blood" are examples of the sort of cultural pride I have in mind. But how real are the bagpipes and the kilts and the poetry of Burns as a cultural force in Australia? The Scot and the Irish and the English are "assimilated", not "integrated" into Australian life.

I look to the future when a person whose great grandfather was an Australian aboriginal will be as proud of the fact as a Scot is rightly proud of his barbaric ancestry.

My final word is that while we accept assimilation as the goal we do not think of assimilation as suppression, nor do we ignore the reality that the transition should be slow—the slower it can be the better—and should be made so as to leave behind it no sense of shame in ancestry. These are great dreams. How can we realise them?

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Colin Ahoy, of Armidale, seemed rather surprised when the photographer took his picture