

Geoffrey Sherington. *Australia's Immigrants 1788-1978*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1980.

Under the general editorship of Dr. Heather Radi of Sydney University, the publishing company of George Allen and Unwin have produced a series of books each dealing with a particular theme in Australian history. Like its accompanying volumes, Sherington's *Australia's Immigrants 1788-1978* would seem to be aimed for the market of the upper secondary school or introductory tertiary level student. As such, it contains many of the deficiencies of the textbook. Most notably, it relies solely upon secondary sources, and, for the most part, the usual titles with which any

undergraduate student in Australian history should already be familiar. Consequently, there is no feeling of discovery of hitherto forgotten primary sources to give the narrative freshness and vigor. Rather, Sherington's interpretation is bland and unimaginative, written in stolid and phlegmatic style. It can be contrasted with Professor Geoffrey Bolton's *Spoils and the Spoilers*, another in the general series, which is a lively and fascinating account of the transformation of the Australian environment since white occupation in 1788.

Certainly, reading Sherington's book, it could be assumed that Australia was a vast unoccupied desolate continent before a British penal settlement was established in New South Wales in January 1788. Clearly, this total disregard for the presence of the 300,000 Aborigines for at least 40,000 years links Sherington's interpretation very unambiguously with the dominant Whig tradition of Australian historiography. This pervasive tradition stresses social harmony, and Australia's destiny is portrayed as an ever-expanding materialistic paradise where calm, reasonable, liberal institutions regulate social, political and economic relations. The overriding preoccupation of late colonial Australia was the implementation of a white Australia policy. Sherington mentions in passing that the Chinese returned to the Victorian goldfields of the 1850s, but neglects to analyze the intense racial conflict that their presence engendered, which was reminiscent of the California experience. Again, he casually refers to the Melanesians in the sugar industry in Queensland but does not even alert the reader to the salient fact that Queensland possessed a classical plantation system like Louisiana.

Sherington's immigrants would mostly seem to have ended up winners--even the convicts, coming from an urban slum of a rapidly industrialising England, improved in the colonies. He gives a quick biography of Michael Robinson, a graduate of Oxford, and of Simeon Lord, who became a wealthy merchant. Such men were not typical of transportees to the Australian colonies. This tendency to laud the successful is repeated over and over. When speaking of the period from the 1850s to 1880, when much of Australia was transformed from brutal frontier environments into large, complex, urban and semi-industrialised towns, Sherington refers to James Munro, a printer who arrived in Melbourne in 1858 and became Premier of Victoria in 1890. Again, when writing of European immigration, Nicholas Laurantos, who began life as a Greek peasant, worked in fruit shops in NSW and ended his career receiving a knighthood and endowing Sydney University with a Chair in Modern Greek, is hardly a usual story. Undoubtedly, many migrants have raised their economic security by coming to Australia, especially in the post-war

boom. Sherington does point out that many migrants, because of the language difficulties and the lack of recognition of their previous technical training, are forced to accept low-paid factory jobs. Rather, it is this aspect of migrant experience which should be stressed. Again, when discussing the emphasis upon post-war migration by successive Labor and Liberal governments, Sherington does not place it within its historical context. Always fearing invasion by the "Yellow Peril," as the Chinese were termed in the nineteenth century, these fears were intensified after the war in the Pacific from 1941 to 1945. The slogan, "populate or perish" reflected deep-seated anxieties in the Australian community. Neither does Sherington make it clear that southern and eastern Europeans were reluctantly accepted when insufficient Britons and northern Europeans were forthcoming. Australia has always been and still is an intensely racist and xenophobic society fearing all outsiders, relegating many of the survivors of the brutal frontier and their descendants upon reserves which operate as Australia's own form of Apartheid, and until recently, maintaining the continent as a bastion of white settlement. Clearly this crucial, if unpleasant theme, needs to be explored if we are to understand fully and without reservation the true importance of Australian immigration policy.

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