Assessment item 2: 50%

Essay format:

In what ways have Indigenous Australian peoples resisted the non-Indigenous occupation of Australia and the policies imposed upon them?

Misinterpretation, confusion, racial conflicts, cultural bombardment and language barriers were just some of the factors that contributed to the resistance of Indigenous Australian peoples to the policies and practices forced upon them and their land by the non-Indigenous, British colonists and their occupation. (A Hundred Years War. para 1.) The majority of this occurred during the years between 1770 and 1970 with the prominent stages being the colonial frontier, protection, segregation and assimilation acts and polices; including the result of the stolen generations through biological absorption.

The colonial frontier of Australia involved the British discovering this land (“terra nullius” as it was once named) in 1770 and then coming on shore near the Botany Bay area. Here they saw the native Aboriginal peoples of this land, “We found the natives tolerably numerous as we advanced up the river, and even at the harbour’s mouth we had reason to conclude the country more populous than Mr. Cook thought it.” (The Expedition to Botany Bay. para.8) Because of this first sighting, showing notably a fair few native peoples the British felt compelled to go ashore and create a compassionate and accepting first impression in order to bring about a good relationship between the two parties. This was surprisingly successful after both met and exchanged a discussion of sorts through gestures and signals. The British then went back aboard their ship confident that they would be able to “take possession of this new territory”. (The Expedition to Botany Bay. para.8)

The colonial frontiers involved a lot of disputes, confrontations and even civil wars. On one side of these frontiers were the Indigenous and on the other were the settlers. Aboriginal tribes experienced and interpreted the activities of European settlement, unfortunately they were unable to distinguish between official and unofficial conduct neither grasp the gravity and velocity of the changes thrown amongst their communities due to their ignorance of British occupation. With this confusion inevitably came conflict on the frontiers when resistance to obey and adhere from Aboriginal communities ignited open warfare. These colonial borders then became battlegrounds,
often ending in mass fatalities on the Indigenous front because of their lack of weapon technology and manpower. (Colonial Frontier. para 1)

Within New South Wales there was a large populous of Aboriginal peoples that had survived the initial atrocities of the invasion by the British settlers and began to reconstruct their lives, families and communities. As this rebuilding began to grow and a sense of mutuality flourished, the Indigenous people felt that they could live alongside the settlers, but this did not last long. Major losses of civil rights followed; such as expulsion from public schools, exclusion from the federal government and the denial of state benefits e.g. unemployment relief. The intervention by the state governments into family and cultural life intensified after 1909 by a “Protection” Policy which focussed on the “dispersion” of Indigenous peoples. (Contested Ground. Overview. p59. para 1) The policies developed for the “protection” of Indigenous peoples were based on reports of their being exploitation by their employers as well as being prone to diseases and separation. However, the vast belief in the general superiority of Europeans was the aim to safeguard the purity of the “white” race as it was increasingly influential at the time.

The Protection Policy was carried out within Queensland through the appointment of John Bleakly as “Chief Protector of Aborigines”. An example of what Bleakly’s role was and of the Protection policies actions, involved a Russian immigrant, Leandro Illin and an Indigenous woman Kitty Clarke and the struggle they went through to formalise their relationship with wed-lock. With the Protection policy ultimately forbidding relationships of sex and marriage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, Bleakley refused their application of marriage as he deemed it to threaten the “purity of the white race”, (Pioneers of Love. 'The Native Problem’ film) thus highlighting the overall consensus of the then federal and state government.

Resistance to such policies and so called “protection” began with the formation of Aboriginal political organisations in the 1920s and 1930s, resulting in heightened platforms of change, demanding land and civil rights to authorities within the government. (Contested Ground. Overview. p60) Discrimination and restrictive control slowed as a result of this successful Aboriginal resistance recruitment including white support and also the needs of manpower leading into the early 1940s war economic situation. This rise in reform by Aboriginal organisations fluctuated throughout the mid 20th century. The 1960s and 70s witnessed a rising degree of frustration expressed by Aboriginal people therefore strengthening their voice within politics. This then increased access to education and a wider spread of white support for reform came from the recognition of the institutional racism throughout Australia which was almost imprinted into all facets of the country. (Contested Ground. Overview. p61) These decades provided growth of self-
determination and sovereignty through innovative creation of Aboriginal aspirations. Unfortunately with these forms of resistance, many fundamental tensions remain and are apparent today.

Segregation was an immensely degrading due to racial action of policy that was carried out within Australia. This being because of the claimed “risk” by non-Indigenous people that the social interaction and proximity with Indigenous peoples would have negative ramifications on non-Indigenous Australian’s health. This claim was eventually found to be baseless but the protests from non-Indigenous people continued. *(Contested Ground. ‘Free, Secular, Public’ and Segregated. p75 para 2)* An example of this segregation came about once the protests of non-Indigenous peoples wore down the central administration of education forcing the Director of Public Institution to regulate racial segregation throughout public schools once any complaint was made by a non-Indigenous parent towards children of Indigenous descent, as of 1902. Indigenous parents all over the country repeatedly challenged these claims, but the resistance was not enough for this racial isolation which was maintained for over 40 years. Up until 1973 all Indigenous children that were believed to have carried an infectious disease were denied access from all public schools. *(Contested Ground. ‘Free, Secular, Public’ and Segregated. p75 para 3)*

Generations of Indigenous children were forcibly removed and taken away from their families by the government, churches and welfare bodies to be raised within institutions and/or fostered out to non-Indigenous families. *(Racism No Way. Fact sheet. para 1)* This was an official government policy until 1969 but was also unofficially practiced all the way back when settlement first occurred where children were used as guides, servants and farm labour. *(Bringing Them Home. Chap 2)* Between 1909 and 1969 it is unknown how many Indigenous children were in fact removed from their families. The “Aborigines Welfare Board” was abolished and with this came a massive loss of records making it extremely difficult to trace many connections back to each institutionalised child. *(Racism No Way. Fact Sheet. para 5)*

An example of the impact that the period of forced removal and assimilation had on Indigenous people involves a man named Paul and the story of his separation from his mother once being made a ward of the state a year after his birth. The reason of this being that, his “Mother is (was) unable to provide adequate care for her son.” *(Bringing Them Home -Paul Story. para 4)* This was heart wrenching and ultimately life ruining for both Paul and his mother as “with the stroke of a pen, my mother’s heart and spirit had been shattered.”being the absolute summary of the dismay and turmoil felt by the mother and later in life by Paul as well. *(Bringing Them Home - Paul story. para 6)* Paul’s mother never gave up trying to locate him, attempting everything she could through letters, pleading to the State Welfare Authorities to give her son back. Eventually Paul was formerly discharged from the State, this was then when he was told everything about his past 18 years, how
he was separated from his natural mother and hidden from his Aboriginal heritage, and also his name was changed back to his mother’s maiden name Angus. This was when Paul realised the “terrible pain of separation, anguish and grief” inflicted upon his mother simply for being aboriginal. 
(Bringing Them Home - Paul story. para 20, 22)

Indigenous Australian peoples experienced extreme amounts of loss through the colonisation, “protection”, segregation and assimilation of this country because of the ideology that the British settlers lived by. The control and manipulation that was placed upon the native culture and peoples of Australia was completely torturous and throughout these periods the Indigenous people continuously fought and resisted the imposed occupations and lifestyles the British tried and in some cases succeeded in enforcing. This mostly ended in either fatality, slavery or banishment slowly tearing apart the fabric of the Indigenous communities and culture, almost wiping out their entire existence. Aboriginal groups, organisations, leaders and with the eventual growth of “white” support, have succeeded in reforming past policies, acts and civil rights made by the government, creating a more equal and mutual Australia where the Indigenous peoples are recognised equally with all others and the atrocities that did occur are now acknowledged.

Word Count - 1524

• Tench, W. (1788). Chapter VIII: From the Fleet's Arrival at Botany Bay to the Evacuation of it; and taking Possession of Port Jackson. Interviews with the Natives; and an Account of the Country about Botany Bay. In A narrative of the expedition to Botany Bay. eBooks@Adelaide 2006


