

Australian Native Police Force

The Australian Native Police Force comprised Aboriginal men and a European Officer. This force helped the Europeans control the Indigenous population and strengthen the myth of a peaceful colonisation by European settlers of an empty country. This group was created to demonstrate Europeans working collaboratively and ‘getting along’ with Australia's Indigenous population.

The myth of peaceful colonisation relied on the colonists' view that the Indigenous inhabitants were not people and had no land ownership. This resulted in Australia being viewed as ‘terra nullius’ which is where the land is legally deemed to be unoccupied or uninhabited ("The Rule of Law and Reconciliation", 2022). Conceivably, European colonists had regarded the continent to be ‘terra nullius’ at the time of discovery, however, it ignores what some historians refer to as the Frontier Wars which are argued to have taken place between 1788 and the 1930s ("Australian Frontier Conflicts – Timeline", 2022). Historians have argued for many years about how many people were killed in colonial violence, however, some say approximately 20,000 Aborigines and between 2,000 and 2,500 Europeans were killed. Other historians have estimated that the Indigenous population at the time of European settlement was over 750,000 and between 1788 and 1900 the Indigenous population was reduced by 90 per cent. In 2014, Queensland University researchers suggested the death toll may have reached 60,000 in Queensland alone. Reliable records of total Indigenous deaths at the hands of colonists are scarce and solely from a European perspective, however, reported accounts of individual incidents have survived. An example is the Skull Hole Massacre which took place near Winton in the late 1800s. Winton police Sergeant Moran led an Australian Native Police Force who claimed the lives of around 200 Koa people while hunting those responsible for the murder of a European. Despite whatever number may eventually be recorded from massacres like the Skull Hole, Aboriginal deaths have been estimated to have been 27 to 33 times higher than Europeans ("What are the Frontier Wars?", 2022). How is this peaceful?

The Australian Native Police Force was formed in 1848 in response to Aborigines raiding and stealing items from settlers. Their essential job was to ‘disperse’ the Aborigines from Queensland. The Native Police worked mainly in what is now southern Queensland to suppress Aboriginal resistance to European settlement in the area ("New South Wales funds Native Police | Australia's Defining Moments Digital Classroom | National Museum of Australia", 2022). The Australian Native Police Force is an example of and supports the writer's hypothesis that the Australian Native Police Force was a symbol and example of collaboration between colonists and Indigenous Australians. This may have reinforced the view that the Indigenous population were content and grateful for European settlement.

In reality, there were only a selected few Aboriginal people working with the Europeans, and these were quickly viewed with mistrust by the Indigenous population. There are several opinions as to why Indigenous men collaborated with the European settlers. However, it is

clear that the Indigenous population resented the arrival of the settlers which is reflected in the opinion expressed by Edward Wilson, editor of The Argus, who stated the following:

In less than twenty years we have nearly swept them off the face of the earth. We have shot them down like dogs. In the guise of friendship, we have issued corrosive sublimates in their damper and consigned whole tribes to the agonies of an excruciating death. We have made them drunkards. We have made them outcasts on their own land, and are rapidly consigning them to entire annihilation ("Shireen Morris: Don't Change the Date, Change Its Meaning", 2022).

Morris suggests the Europeans never had plans to make peace with the locals and the Native Police Force was a tool to use against the indigenous population. Further, there was never a peaceful colonisation of an empty country, and this view blatantly ignores the violent period known as the Frontier Wars and is used to justify the settlement of Australia by European colonists. In 1835 the NSW Governor, Richard Bourke, implemented the legal principle of 'terra nullius' in Australian law to justify British settlement. This was 47 years after the arrival of the First Fleet. It is now accepted that Indigenous culture was present and vibrant at this time.

The Native Police Force was made up of Indigenous Australians with a European commander and was used as an example of collaboration between Indigenous Australians and European settlers. However, there was never a peaceful colonisation of an empty country or 'terra nullius' as claimed by British settlers. The Native Police Force helped continue the myth of peaceful colonisation of an 'empty country' by British settlers as it was used as an example of Indigenous Australians helping Europeans to settle in Australia.

Reference List-

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