

By playing key roles in the 1965 Freedom Ride, 1967 Referendum and in calls for reconciliation, Charles Perkins gained significant rights and freedoms for his people. His key role in the Freedom Ride and controversial actions during the 1960s allowed Charles Perkins to successfully advocate for the desegregation of Australian institutions and towns, and a reduction of discrimination against Indigenous Australians. Charles Perkins was a key player in the Freedom Ride and the publicity surrounding the 1967 Referendum, both revolutionary in exposing the discrimination and segregation existing in Australia and educating Australians about the problems that existed in Australian society. His peaceful protest, controversial commentary and campaigning brought publicity to the problems facing Indigenous Australians. This resulted in widespread change and greater equality, as a result of land rights, the desegregation of institutions and towns, and a reduction in racial discrimination. Although Charles Perkins campaigned for change, he was successful mainly in increasing publicity of the problems facing Indigenous Australians. However, this publicity was instrumental in later reforms which granted greater rights and freedoms for Indigenous Australians.

Before the 1960s, Australia treated Indigenous Australians as "savages..., the lowest in the scale of humanity" (Spalding, I 1965 in Taffe, S 2008), resulting in widespread segregation and discrimination. In Australia, many Indigenous Australians in country towns were viewed as an unhygienic, inferior social subclass which needed special 'protection' (Cameron, K et al. 2000). This attitude was enshrined in both State and Commonwealth Constitution, stating that the Commonwealth could introduce legislation for "the people of any race, other than the Aboriginal race in any State, for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws", such as protectionism in the nineteenth century (Mason, K J 2007). Ergo, Indigenous Australians were segregated from white Australians in living areas, hospitals, separate seating areas "down the front" in cinemas (Screen Australia Digital Learning 2012), and were refused entry to local swimming pools, such as in Moree, to reduce contact between the two races (Cameron, K et al. 2000). In addition, many Indigenous Australians were forcefully removed to reserves under the policy of protectionism, where rations and income payments were minimally distributed and were unequal to those received by white Australians (Mason, K J 2007). Following the dominant ideology that indigenous peoples were a dying race, the government aimed to bridge the social and economic gap between the indigenous and white inhabitants by imposing white culture but, instead, provided inferior education as farm labourers or domestic helpers (Cameron, K et al. 2000). The reality was the creation of a new generation of traumatised, decultured and displaced people who "were neither black nor white" (Bringing Them Home report in Mason, K J 2007). When protectionism proved to be ineffective, the policy of assimilation was introduced. Indigenous Australians were encouraged to 'relinquish' their Aboriginality and "attain the same manner of living as other Australians ... enjoying the same rights and privileges" (Native Welfare Conference in Mason, K J 2007). As a result of discrimination and exclusion from society, many lived on the fringes of towns in shacks and tin shanties where no utilities such as running water and sewerage systems were available (Cameron, K et al. 2000). This racism angered Charles Perkins, who believed that, "second class is not good enough" (Screen Australia Digital Learning 2012) for Aborigines, which motivated him to campaign for change.

In 1965, Charles Perkins was motivated to replicate Martin Luther King Jr's Freedom Ride in Australia, to expose previously ignored segregation and discrimination in Australian society. King had led Freedom Rides against racial segregation in pre-1965 United States of America (Mason, K J 2007). The resulting international publicity inspired Perkins, who developed a passion to reverse the injustices faced by Indigenous Australians (Taffe, S 2008). As co-founder and president of the *Student Action for Aborigines* group at the University of Sydney 1964, Perkins led 30 predominantly white classmates including a reporter for the ABC on the Freedom Ride (Taffe, S 2008), showing the amount of concern and support of the younger generation for his cause. However, the aim of information gathering later evolved into picketing against discrimination and segregation in such towns as Walgett, Moree and Kempsey (Swirk.com, 2012), where racial tensions were highest. The students protested at the Moree baths by attempting to accompany six Aboriginal children into the pool (Taffe, S 2008). They attempted to reverse the dominant ideology that Indigenous peoples were "**dirty, lived in shabby conditions and...drank to excess**" (Bringing Them Home report in Mason, K J 2007). The Riders were spat, "booed and catcalled" at, and students were carried away from the area by Mayor William Lloyd, pool manager Mr Don Ford, councillors and police (Spalding, I 1965 in Taffe, S 2008). These scenes were broadcasted by national and international media, which led to increasing support and interest in the question of racism against Indigenous Australians. Pressure came from both national and international communities for the Australian Government to legislate change (Mason, K J 2007). From the white perspective, the Freedom Ride was successful as it raised

the consciousness of and "educated the white race" (Kath Walker in Mason, K J 2007) about the injustices of racism and segregation faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. However, from the Indigenous perspective, the Freedom Ride was of short duration and created conflict for local Aborigines who were then abandoned and left to resolve the aftermath, even though repeat trips were made for further desegregation campaigns (Skwirk.com 2012). Charles Perkins consequently became a national spokesman for Aborigines' rights.

Publicity of the problems facing Indigenous Australians achieved by the Freedom Ride, aided the 'Yes' campaign during the 1967 referendum, which eventually led to some social reform for Indigenous Australians. The 1967 referendum asked white Australians to decide on a change to Australia's Constitution, specifically the removal of "aboriginal natives shall not be counted", "in reckoning the number of the people in the Commonwealth" and "the people of any race other than the aboriginal race in any State" when creating legislation, from the Commonwealth Constitution (Mason, K J 2007). The Freedom Rides had assisted in decreasing previous white 'ignorance' of Indigenous Australians' problems, and, it is claimed, generated a widespread "sense of fair play" (Indigenous activist, Kath Walker in Mason, K J 2007), goodwill and support for social reform. This support amounted in the success of the historic 1967 referendum with the 'Yes' vote of 90.77% (Cameron, K et al. 2000), showing the positive shift in attitude of many white Australians towards Indigenous Australians and the expectation that the Aborigines' situation would improve. At the time, Charles Perkins was the manager of the Foundation of Aboriginal Affairs, which was an advocate for the 'Yes' vote, distributing pamphlets and advertisements with other Aboriginal activists, such as Faith Bandler (Taffe, S 2008). It should be noted that a 'No' case was not promoted by any official body, thus highlighting the support of the 'Yes' campaign by official bodies against discrimination and segregation of Indigenous Australians. This showed a positive shift in attitude away from the ideology that Indigenous Australians were an inferior, second culture with poor education, employment and lifestyle, to the recognition which Charles Perkins had fought for, that Indigenous Australians were equal to white Australians with a unique culture.

Charles Perkins led the Freedom Ride and was instrumental in bringing about the 1967 referendum, both of which were significant in raising the consciousness of Australians about the discrimination and segregation of Indigenous Australians. He gained publicity through peaceful protest and, as a result, Indigenous Australians later gained recognition as Australian citizens and as a unique, different, but equal culture, through national legislation. Although Aborigines still currently face problems in health, employment, and education, the work of Charles Perkins has improved their conditions greatly. Charles Perkins' legacy is that he improved the lives of many Indigenous Australians by having the courage to openly and publicly raise awareness of the problems facing Indigenous Australians.

Bibliography:

Cameron, K et.al 2000, *Investigating Australia's 20th Century History*, Nelson Australia Pty Limited, South Melbourne, Victoria

This source was credible as it used primary sources and corroborated with other sources. It was useful as it was easy to read and had extracts from books, letters and newspapers. The author used neutral language, but did not provide a negative perspective.

Mason K J 2007, *Experience of Nationhood – Modern Australia Since 1901*, 5th edition, McGraw-Hill Australia Pty Ltd, North Ryde

This source is credible as it has many primary sources and is useful as it provides a wide range of information from a long time period. It has neutral use of language, but mainly presents a perspective that is slightly biased towards Indigenous Australians.

Screen Australia Digital Learning 2008, *Charles Perkins Full Interview Transcript*, Australian Biography, Canberra, viewed 1 May 2012, <http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/perkins/interview7.htm>

This source is credible as it is a primary source, with responses taken from Charles Perkins himself. It was useful as it provided evidence for the essay, though it was biased as it only presents Perkins' perspective.

Skwirk.com 2012, *Charles Perkins: Freedom Rides*, Red Apple Education Ltd., Sydney, NSW, viewed 30 April 2012, <http://www.skwirk.com.au/p-c_s-14_u-117_t-319_c-1079/charles-perkins-freedom-rides/nsw/charles-perkins-freedom-rides/power-people-and-politics-in-the-post-war-period/people-and-power>

This source corroborated with other sources and provided evidence for the essay. It had neutral use of language and presented a negative perspective of Charles Perkins and the Freedom Rides.

Taffe, S 2008, *Charles Perkins*, The National Museum of Australia, viewed 30 April 2012, <<http://www.indigenoustrights.net.au/person.asp?pid=983>>

This author is reliable as she has a doctorate and her article has been posted on an Australian Government website. It was useful as it was easy to read and provided evidence for the essay. The author was biased towards Charles Perkins.

Taffe, S 2008, *Freedom Ride, 1965*, The National Museum of Australia, viewed 30 April 2012, <<http://indigenoustrights.net.au/section.asp?sid=33>>

This author is reliable as she has a doctorate and her article has been posted on an Australian Government website. It was useful as it was easy to read and contained many primary sources. The author was presented both positive and negative perspectives on the event.