



RIDE TO FREEDOM

1 The 1960s was a time of great change, particularly in Australia and the United States of America, where many individuals took great risks to challenge what they saw as unfair race relations.

At that time, most Indigenous Australians lived far apart from cities. They lived on reserves or stations. Others lived in makeshift houses on the edges of country towns. There was usually no water, electricity, sanitation, rubbish removal, or roads for these houses. These are services that most people, both then and now, take for granted in Australia.

2 Aboriginal people were also forbidden to use certain shops, hotels, restaurants and pools. In some hospitals they were not allowed into the wards. They had to sleep out on the verandahs. In cinemas they were only allowed to sit in certain areas, separated from other people. Some schools had different buses for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.

3 Not everyone approved of this, including many students at the University of Sydney. They wanted people to know about the terrible problems Aboriginal Australians were facing, and try to

stop the discrimination. They got an idea from the American Freedom Riders. These were black and white Americans who travelled together in 1961 to the American South on public buses. This was even though at that time American buses and bus terminals were segregated according to race.

4 In February 1965, thirty students toured northern New South Wales for two weeks by bus. They spoke to Indigenous Australians in eight towns to find out about their living conditions. They also wanted to find out how non-Indigenous locals treated Aboriginal townsfolk. This became known as the Australian Freedom Rides.

When they discovered that Aboriginal ex-servicemen were not allowed to join the Returned Services League in Walgett, the students demonstrated outside the RSL club.

5 In Moree, Indigenous Australians were banned from using the town pool for 'health reasons', but the Freedom Riders managed to bring about twenty Aboriginal children into the pool. Many of the non-Aboriginal townspeople were angry about this rule being broken, and fights broke out. The media reported these scenes around the world, and three months later, the town council lifted the ban. The Moree Baths are now registered with the Australian Heritage Commission for the role they played in changing Australia's social landscape.

6 In the Bowraville movie theatre, Aboriginal citizens had to enter separately and sit in a partitioned-off section. After the Freedom Riders' demonstration in their town, Aboriginal people refused to go to the cinema. It closed later that year.

A number of follow-up rides were held during 1966 and 1967. They received much media coverage both in Australia and overseas.

7 The 1960s also saw Aboriginal community leaders taking action and contacting politicians. In 1963,

the Yolngu people of Yirrkala in the Northern Territory, sent a petition to Prime Minister Robert Menzies. It was a protest against plans to mine their land. The petition was written on a piece of bark. This historic item is now displayed in Parliament House in Canberra.

8 At the same time, the Gurindji people in the Northern Territory were working as station hands on the Wave Hill cattle station, which had been set up on their traditional land. However, they wanted to be paid the same wages as the non-Aboriginal stockmen. They also wanted to have their traditional land returned to them. In 1966, led by Vincent Lingiari, they walked off the cattle station, and set up their own one near sacred sites at Wattie Creek. It wasn't until eight years later they were finally given the lease to their traditional land.

9 All of these events, and their media coverage, had made people more aware of inequalities in Australia, and many wanted to overcome them. During the 1960s, public opinion forced the State and Federal governments to change their laws so that Indigenous Australians could vote in elections.

The Federal Government also conducted a national referendum to decide if Aboriginal people should be included in censuses. Before this, information about Indigenous Australians and their housing, employment, education, religion and so on was not collected in the census. In May 1967 over 90% of Australians voted to change this.

10 The USA also saw similar movements to educate people on their civil rights. In 1962, only 6.7% of the African American people in Mississippi were registered to vote. In an attempt to redress this, a number of civil rights groups organised the 'Freedom Vote' for 1963. This was a mock election that gave black people the chance to practise voting. In the summer of 1964, volunteers

encouraged African American people to register to vote. They also established 30 'Freedom Schools' that taught over 3,000 black children, and opened community centres offering legal and health services.

11 However white resistance to this was strong and often resulted in violence. Three volunteers, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were killed in Mississippi, just one day after arriving there to help register local people to vote.

12 Others were beaten and homes, churches and schools were burnt, but despite this, by the end of 1964 over 70,000 people had been involved in 'Freedom Summer'. The next year the Voting Rights Act was passed, which overrode the right of individual states to prevent African American people from voting, and by 1969, 66.5% of voting-

age black people in Mississippi were registered to vote.

Once again, the power of individuals joining together for what they believed to be right, had resulted in huge social change.



Questions

- Where were a lot of Indigenous Australians forced to sleep when visiting a hospital in the 1960s?
 - in stations
 - in wards
 - on verandahs
- The American Freedom Riders
 - travelled together in 1961 on public buses.
 - wanted to know what Indigenous Australians were experiencing.
 - were all white Americans.
- In what town did the Freedom Riders protest around the pool?
 - Walgett
 - Moree
 - Bowraville
- Robert Menzies received a bark petition from
 - the Freedom Riders.
 - the Yolngu people.
 - the Gurindji people.
- In what year was the Freedom Summer held?
 - 1962
 - 1963
 - 1964
- The American and Australian Freedom Rides were successful because
 - they forced people to do things against their will.
 - they increased public awareness.
 - they reached out to Aboriginal Australians.

Vocabulary

Find words in the text that match the meanings below. The word is in the section shown in brackets.

- Not allowed or banned (2)
- Set apart from others (3)
- An organised rally to express opinions (6)
- Multiple cases of unfair treatment (9)
- Pretend or fake (10)

Grammar

Articles (*the, a, an*) are words that are situated before a noun to show a specific or general thing. E.g. **the** cat, **a** table, **an** apple. Add an article to these sentences below from the text.

- They got ___ idea from the American Freedom Riders.
- They had to sleep out on ___ verandahs.
- This was ___ mock election.
- The petition was on ___ piece of bark.

Back To The Text...

- In section 9, "The Federal Government also conducted a national referendum ..." is
 - fact.
 - opinion.
- In which part of the library would you find this text?
 - science
 - history
- Key words are important words that help you understand the main ideas. Which of the following is a key word in section 5?
 - banned
 - registered

Sequencing

Look back through the card to find what happened first? Choose **a** or **b**.

- The first Australian Freedom Ride took place.
 - The 'Freedom Vote' was organised in the USA.
- The Yolngu people petitioned the Prime Minister.
 - Australians voted to include Aborigines in the census.

Think About This

- The illustration on page 3 really represents
 - a hand shake.
 - an exchange of flags.
 - an understanding between the cultures.
- The landscape depicted on the front of the card represents
 - a storm coming.
 - the Aboriginal flag.
 - the end of a very hot day.
- Why do you think the writer put quotation marks around 'health reasons' in section 5?
 - To show how foolish this idea was.
 - To clarify the meaning of the words.
 - To suggest that this information is more important than the rest.

Challenge Option

Writing: Write an acrostic poem called FREEDOM.

