

# VCE Sociology

## Units 3 & 4

Fiona Gontier



Social Education Victoria

## **VCE Sociology Units 3 & 4**

by Fiona Gontier

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Social Education Victoria has compiled and published a range of textbooks designed for new VCE Study Designs beginning in 2012. Of the four new publications, two are for Politics - namely *VCE Australian and Global Politics Units 1 & 2*, by Kimberly Cornell, and *VCE Global Politics Units 3 & 4*, by Anna-Louise Simpson. The other two textbooks are for Sociology - namely *VCE Sociology Units 1 & 2*, by Pheona Donohoe, and *VCE Sociology Units 3 & 4*, by Fiona Gontier.

The compilation of the textbooks has been a complex task and one that has been completed according to a very tight timeframe. In the role of SEV Executive Editor of these textbook projects, I have worked closely with a large group of people. I would like to congratulate the authors, the researchers, the design team, the editors, proofreaders and the printers for the commitment, diligence, patience and skill they have exhibited over the journey.

It should be noted that SEV regards these textbooks as an ongoing project and is working on additional materials (to be available to SEV members via the website) that will enhance or add to the textbook's case studies and examples. Please refer to [www.sev.asn.au](http://www.sev.asn.au) for further details.

On behalf of Social Education Victoria and our various stakeholders, and sincerely hoping that I don't neglect to mention anyone, I would like to specifically recognise the following people and thank them for their important contributions to this book, *VCE Sociology Units 3 & 4*: Fiona Gontier (author), Neil Todd (permissions and proofreading), David McBurney (cover design and production advice), Dr Lyle Monro, Matilda Darvall, Chris Keeler, Dr Millsom Henry-Waring, Janet Argeres (expert advice), Diane Mansour (proofreading), Colin Fiford (proofreading) and Tess Baster and Anna Makridis of Currency Communications (printing and production advice). Finally, I wish to thank Lesley Williams at Major Street Publishing and Kerry Stacey from Production Works, for their monumental effort in editing, design and layout of the book.

In closing, I wish to highlight the online support SEV will also provide as a part of your textbook purchase. At the SEV website ([www.sev.asn.au](http://www.sev.asn.au)) there will be some links to the relevant URLs that are referred to throughout each textbook. Instead of having to type in each link from the textbook, simply identify which ones you might like to explore further and then click through to them via the SEV website!

We at Social Education Victoria trust that this publication will help to play a part in your enjoyment and understanding of this subject and wish you all the best for your studies.

**James Fiford**  
Executive Officer  
Social Education Victoria

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The **'Stolen Generations'** is the expression used to describe the Aboriginal people of Australia who were forcibly removed from their families as children between 1900s and the 1960s, to be brought up by white foster families or institutions (JoyZine 2011).

## ETHNOCENTRIC REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE

Historical representations of Australian Indigenous culture were influenced by the ethnocentric views of British colonists. At this time there were competing philosophical views about Indigenous peoples around the world. One perspective, influenced by descriptions of Polynesian societies by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1719-1778), saw Australian Indigenous people as **'noble savages'** who were admired for their courage and freedom, living simple, contented lives (Broome 2010, p. 20).

At the other extreme, Indigenous peoples were seen as the lowest form of humankind on the **'Great Chain of Being'**. This was a hierarchical order ranking all living beings. Europeans were placed highest of the human races and Indigenous Australians lowest, nearest the animals. The pseudoscience of phrenology was very influential in these claims of biological differences. The theory claimed that the shape and bumps on a person's head approximated the personality, abilities and size of the brain within. Working from this theory, it was assessed that Indigenous Australians were both a morally and intellectually inferior homogenous race (Germov & Poole 2011, p. 275).

A subsequent theory of this era was that of **natural selection**. The process proposed by Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was used to explain the evolution of the natural world and had been applied by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) to human societies in the context of the 'survival of the fittest'. This scientific racism was also used to 'prove' that Indigenous Australians were biologically and culturally inferior to the British colonisers. It was believed that they were a race that was doomed to extinction. The phrase "smoothing the pillow of a dying race" was used at the time to justify the need to 'protect' Indigenous survivors of **colonisation** through segregation on reserves (University of South Australia 2009).

From the late 19th century some Australian Indigenous cultural symbols in the form of art gradually gained acceptance, but it was primarily understood through the category of 'primitive' art. This allowed the work of Indigenous peoples to be admired and became a source of inspiration for some European artists. The label of 'primitive' art, however, created a problem in that Indigenous peoples were seen as being connected with nature and their work was



**IMAGE 3.05:** Stolen Generations memorial at Mount Annan Botanic Garden

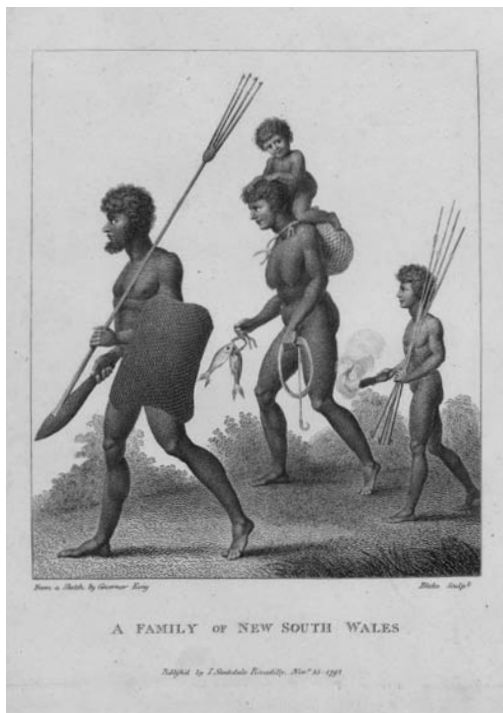
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**"Great Chain of Being".** Refers to a hierarchical order ranking all living beings. Europeans were placed highest of the human races and Indigenous Australians lowest, nearest the animals.

**Natural selection.** Refers to a process proposed by Charles Darwin (1809-1882) used to explain the evolution of the natural world which had been applied by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) to human societies in the context of the "survival of the fittest".

**Colonisation.** When a nation takes and maintains power over a territory that is outside its boundaries, based on a belief of superiority over those being colonised.

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**IMAGE 3.06:** William Blake engraver, after Philip Gidley King – *A Family of New South Wales*, 1773; engraving, printed in black ink, from one copper plate; image 19 x 16.1cm; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

perceived as representations from the past, rather than contemporary works. While there were many collections displayed in museums and galleries, none of the displays reflected an appreciation for the cultural meaning and significance of the objects to the Australian Indigenous artists who had created the pieces (Kleinhert 2004).

### CONTEMPORARY ETHNOCENTRISM

While there have been many strategies adopted over time to help address bias, subjectivity and racism in the portrayal and reporting of Australian Indigenous culture, there remain ethnocentric representations. These include (Creative Spirits 2011):

- the exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from representations such as print and television advertising;
- stereotypical portrayals of Australian Indigenous people in tourism advertising reflecting the ‘noble savage’;
- the ongoing myth in film and television that most Indigenous Australians live in remote and regional parts of Australia;
- the over-reporting in news and current affairs programs of Indigenous Australians as victims and perpetrators of violence, and/or paternalistic reporting of social disadvantage.

#### ACTIVITY 3.06:

1. Go to the Creative Spirits website - Stereotypes and prejudice of ‘Aboriginal Australia’  
[www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/aboriginal-australia-stereotype.html](http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/aboriginal-australia-stereotype.html)
2. Read the contrasting ways that Australian Indigenous culture is presented through the positive stereotypes of the advertising compared to the alternative news reports under the following section: “What tourism advertising does not tell’ and ‘Aboriginal Australia - advertising vs news.”
3. How do the concepts of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism apply to these examples?
4. What is the potential impact of positive stereotyping in the tourism industry on the awareness and perception of Australian Indigenous culture?

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**Industrial Revolution (1760-1850).** This refers to a very significant change that redefined the way society was structured and it has had a lasting impact on the modern world. The Industrial Revolution transformed society economically (moving from an agrarian - farming - economy to a manufacturing economy), technologically (from manual to mechanical labour), and socially (from rural to urban life, and changing control over labour processes and gender relations).

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- Cultural communities, such as a local club, sub-culture, ethnic group, religious, or multicultural group. Examples include Indigenous and Greek-Australian groups.
- Community organisations, including more formal groups such as political associations, work groups, professional associations and charitable organisations. Examples include disability support groups, refugee advocacy groups, Greenpeace and the Lions Club.
- Interest-based communities, comprising people who share a common identity other than location and who often interact regularly. For example, a sporting club or a Land Care environmental group.
- Intentional communities, formed with the purpose of providing social and/or practical support for a group. Examples include a retirement village or nursing home, communes, housing cooperatives and a young mothers' group.
- Internet communities, which are groups of people who may have never met, but who share some interest or connection via the Internet. Examples include Second Life, blogs, Facebook and political/non-government organisations.

#### ACTIVITY 4.01

Using the Internet and print sources such as encyclopaedia, sociology dictionaries and textbooks and compare and contrast a number of definitions of 'community'.

1. What do the definitions have in common?
2. What are the unique features of the definitions?
3. Is it possible to see how the definition of community may have changed over time? Explain.

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**Tonnies.** Ferdinand Tonnies' surname is pronounced 'Turneze'. Although the VCE Study Design spells his name Tonnies the German spelling is Tönnies.

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## The concept of community

Ferdinand **Tonnies** (1855-1936), Max Weber (1864-1920) and other sociologists became interested in communities and their purpose in broader society during a time of significant social change in Europe and America caused by industrialisation and urbanisation (i.e. living in cities close to places of work). These processes had an enormous impact on people's daily lives and social relationships. For example, there was a loss of the close-knit life of the village based on ties centred on the family, the neighbourhood and the church. It was replaced by an urban life that was viewed as lacking in depth and warmth, influenced by impersonal and superficial relationships.

## INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The **Industrial Revolution (1760-1850)** refers to a very significant change that redefined the way society was structured and it has had a lasting impact on the modern world. It transformed society economically (moving from an agrarian - farming - economy to a manufacturing economy), technologically (from manual to mechanical labour), and socially (from rural to urban life, and changing control over labour processes and gender relations).

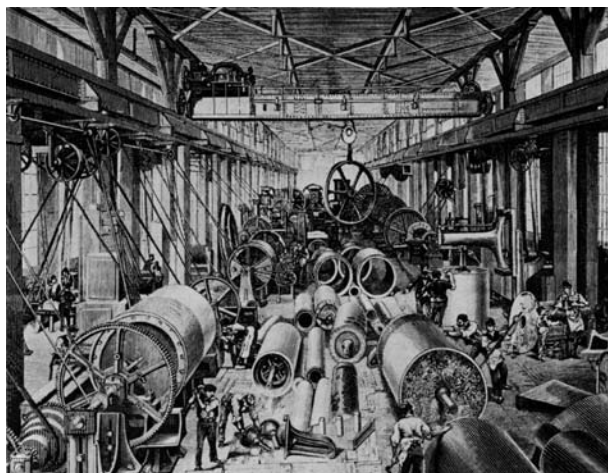
The European industrial revolution and British colonisation of Australia happened at approximately the same time. The transportation of the first group of convicts to Sydney occurred at the same time that steam power was being applied to problems with pumping water from Northumberland mines in the north east of England. The voyage of the First Fleet between 1786 and 1788 has been described as adopting the “rational use of scientific knowledge for practical purposes” (Australian Heritage Council 2003).

## FERDINAND TONNIES

In the late 19th century, the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies (1855-1937) studied how life in the new industrial cities differed from life in rural villages. Tonnies introduced two concepts that reflected the contrast between very different social experiences (Macionis 2010, p. 580). The German word **Gemeinschaft** (community) was used to describe a social group in which people are closely tied by kinship (family) and tradition. Tonnies used the word **Gesellschaft**, which is usually translated as ‘society’ to describe the informal and impersonal relationships that occur within cities.

### Gemeinschaft

In traditional villages the intimate ties of Gemeinschaft connected people. Tonnies described these connections as being based on blood (kinship), mind (sense of being a unique group) and land. Gemeinschaft communities were seen as being culturally homogeneous as shaped by the moral laws of the church and family. There was also minimal social and geographical mobility. Tonnies’ work reflects an admiration for the way that Gemeinschaft groups maintain social cohesion, and a concern about the loss of these forms of community (Macionis 2010, p. 580).



**IMAGE 4.01:** A German image reflecting the industrial revolution from 1875. “The assembly hall for the engineering works Escher Wyss in Zurich Neumuhle”.

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### Gemeinschaft (community).

A term used by German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies that refers to relationships on a community-level that are cohesive, close and long-lasting. Gemeinschaft is often used to describe family relationships and relationships within small geographical communities.

### Gesellschaft (community).

A term used by German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies that relates to relationships on a societal-level that are individualistic and impersonal. Gesellschaft is used to describe post-industrial and urban relationships, where people are more anonymous, private and busy.

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