

AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY

A series that profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time



Malcolm Fraser
1930-2015
Former Prime Minister

This program is an episode of **Australian Biography** Series 3 produced under the National Interest Program of Film Australia. This well-established series profiles some of the most extraordinary Australians of our time. Many have had a major impact on the nation's cultural, political and social life. All are remarkable and inspiring people who have reached a stage in their lives where they can look back and reflect. Through revealing in-depth interviews, they share their stories—of beginnings and challenges, landmarks and turning points. In so doing, they provide us with an invaluable archival record and a unique perspective on the roads we, as a country, have travelled.

Australian Biography: Malcolm Fraser

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SYNOPSIS

Born in Melbourne in 1930, Malcolm Fraser grew up on farming properties in NSW and Victoria. In 1948 he was accepted into Oxford, graduating with a Masters of Arts degree.

On his return to Australia, Fraser entered politics and at the age of 25 was elected the Liberal member for Wannon in Victoria, a seat previously held by the Labor Party. In 1966, he was made Minister for the Army in the Holt Government, and after Holt's death in 1967, he became Minister for Education and Science.

After the Labor victory of 1972, Fraser recast his political image and won the Liberal party leadership. Following the dramatic dismissal of the Whitlam Government in November 1975, Malcolm Fraser became Prime Minister. He was to hold office for over seven years.

Fraser is perhaps most remembered for his role in the political upheaval of 1975, a series of events which commentators continue to scrutinize. More recently, Fraser was co-chairman of the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, which worked toward democracy in South Africa. He formed the humanitarian aid organization CARE Australia in 1987, which he chaired until 2002, and served as president and vice-president of CARE International.

CURRICULUM LINKS

This program will have interest and relevance for students from middle to secondary levels studying Modern History, Civics and Citizenship, Politics, Legal Studies, Economics, Studies of Society and Environment, English and Media Studies.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This study guide provides teachers and students with a background to some of the events that Malcolm Fraser became involved in during his career, and deals with issues raised in the program. Teachers may wish to establish students' knowledge and discuss the historical context prior to viewing the program.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Vietnam War

Throughout his political career, Malcolm Fraser was involved in a number of controversial events both in Australia and overseas. One of these was the Vietnam War, coinciding with his term as Minister for the Army (January 1966–February 1968).

Following World War Two, Vietnam, a former French colony, was temporarily divided into north and south. The north was Communist-led under Ho Chi Minh, while the south was led by US-backed Ngo Dinh Diem. According to international agreement, leadership of a fully independent and united Vietnam would be determined by national elections in 1956. After Diem refused to hold elections, Minh's supporters in the south revolted. By 1960, fully-fledged civil war had broken out.

The conflict had already attracted support from China, the Soviet Union and the United States. As the conflict escalated, this support started to include military and economic aid. Support from the United States included finance, equipment and 'military advisers'. By 1963, there were 15,000 American military advisers in South Vietnam, a figure that would increase to 550,000 by 1969. Many of these were civilian conscripts.

The most significant and devastating aspect of US intervention in Vietnam was the aerial bombing campaigns in both the north and

south. Initiated by President Johnson in 1964, the massive bombing campaign lasted close to nine years. By 1970, more bombs had been dropped on Vietnam than on all targets in the whole of human history.

In response to American calls for support, the Australian government committed troops to the war from 1965. Of the 50,000 Australian troops in Vietnam, many were civilians called up for service under the national conscription scheme, introduced in 1964.

The justification for US involvement was to contain the threat of Communism. Against this, some argued that the initial conflict essentially concerned national liberation and thus US military intervention could not be justified. In the late 1960s and 1970s, criticism of conscription and America's involvement led to a huge anti-war movement in the West, especially in the United States, but also in Australia.

America's combat in the war formally ended in January 1973 with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, however their involvement in the region lasted for several more years. The cost in human lives was devastating for both sides.

Discussion questions

- In reference to South Africa, Fraser says, 'People who are not free, who have no political rights, if they have no capacity ... ultimately they only have the force and power they can muster with their arms.' How can this statement apply to the initial conflict in Vietnam?
- Would you agree with Fraser that the commitment of Australian troops and conscripts was justified?
- What alternative forms of intervention could have been pursued by the USA to settle conflict in Vietnam?
- Can you think of any other examples of foreign military intervention in a civil conflict? In what circumstances do you think such intervention is justifiable?

Apartheid in South Africa

During his term as Prime Minister, it could be argued that Fraser's most notable contributions were in diplomacy and Australia's relations abroad. After his political career, he continued to be involved in diplomatic missions, particularly in South Africa where he urged reform of the country's Apartheid policy. In 1985, he was Chairman of a United Nations Panel of Eminent Persons on the Role of Transnational Corporations in South Africa. From October 1985, he jointly chaired the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons against Apartheid in South Africa.

Apartheid was a formal policy of racial segregation introduced by the all-white National Party in 1948, and lasting until 1990. The Apartheid laws classified people according to three major racial groups—white; Bantu, or black Africans; and those of mixed descent. The laws determined where members of each group could live, what jobs they could hold, their education and their social associations, including marriage. Black African representation in Parliament was also ended.

Throughout the Apartheid period, non-white South Africans organised resistance against the oppressive regime of Apartheid. The African National Congress (ANC), under Nelson Mandela's leadership, was one of the main forms of organised resistance.

The strong government reaction to this opposition escalated the violence, leaving many blacks imprisoned, killed or wounded.

For example, in March 1960, police were ordered to open fire on a mass demonstration in Sharpeville, killing 69 blacks. The massacre led to further protests around the country and resulted in the ANC adopting more aggressive tactics.

Apartheid also attracted heavy international criticism. Two years after the Sharpeville Massacre, the United Nations imposed the first of a set of sanctions on South Africa. In 1974, South Africa was suspended from the UN General Assembly, and by the 1980s Apartheid was internationally referred to as a crime against humanity. Other countries, including the United States, would impose sanctions as well.

As internal and external pressure intensified, the Apartheid policies began to unravel and a path to reform was forged. Eventually, in 1990, newly-elected President F. W. de Klerk proclaimed a formal end to Apartheid.

Discussion questions

- What led Malcolm Fraser to the conclusion that violence would be the only outcome of Apartheid in South Africa? Why did he condemn the South African Government?
- What other examples can you think of where Australia actively encouraged political reform in another country?
- What other forms of foreign intervention were involved in opposing Apartheid? What do you think the effect of these were?
- Look at some of the photos from the websites mentioned at the end of this study guide. How does such photography influence our understanding of overseas crises?

GOVERNMENT

Political Power

During the interview, Fraser refers to Niccolo Machiavelli, a 16th century Italian diplomat and political theorist. Machiavelli is well-known for his famous and controversial treatise, **The Prince**.

In **The Prince**, Machiavelli sets out ways to effectively secure and maintain power, discussing the use of armies, conduct of diplomacy to protect and build power, and how to win the people's favour. A prince, he argues, must have the strength of a lion and the cunning of a fox if he is to maintain power.

Taken to the extreme, Machiavelli suggests that in matters of politics, the ends justifies the means. Indeed Machiavelli believed that power should be the main focus of any leader, over and above any principles of morality or justice. These principles were still important to Machiavelli, but could always be put aside when necessity dictated. At the end of the day, claims Machiavelli, people want power either for a particular purpose (means to an end) or because they like to use power (an end in itself). Malcolm Fraser also makes this point in the interview.

While the chief concern of his treatise was with principalities, many have applied it to other forms of political organization, including democratic states. Importantly, these ideas coined a particular approach to leadership style. The phrase 'Machiavellian' is used to describe an amoral person who uses cunning and manipulation to obtain power.

Discussion questions

- What does Fraser think about Machiavelli's ideas applied to a democracy? Do you agree?
- What restraints on power exist in the Australian system of government?

■ Do you think that the ends always justifies the means in politics? What exceptions might apply to this idea?

■ How might Machiavelli's ideas have influenced Fraser's thinking about events in his political career? Give some examples.

■ 'Power is the main intention of those involved in politics.' Do you agree? Discuss.

Australia's Political Party System

Australia has essentially a two-party system, comprising the Labor Party and Liberal/National Coalition. In addition, there are a number of smaller, or minority, parties including the Democrats, the Greens and independent members.

The party system is an important feature of Australian democracy. It enhances the representative nature of Parliament by ensuring that diverse public interests are represented. Some minority parties represent community interest in specific issues including the environment, immigration and legal reform.

Another important feature of the party system are party factions. This is particularly the case in the major parties, where party factions often affect overall party policies. Factions are divisions within parties normally based around policy difference or personal allegiance. They can influence what policies are adopted, what candidates are selected to run for electoral seats and overall party leadership. Factions can fall into conflict over each of these issues.

Factions are the focus of some criticism of the major political parties. Some argue that factions bog political parties down in competing factional interests rather than addressing the interests of the electorate. A party leadership that can contain the effects of faction fighting is often congratulated, but questions are raised about the means used to do this.

Discussion questions

- What were Malcolm Fraser's reasons for resigning from the Gorton Government?
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of party divisions or factions.
- Do you think strong party leadership is a solution to faction fighting? What other solutions might be available?
- Can you think of any other problems with the political party system? How might these be addressed?

Governor-General

Under the Constitution, the office of Governor-General is Australia's official head-of-state. As the Queen's representative in Australia, the Governor-General is appointed by the Queen upon the advice of the Prime Minister. It is this arrangement that makes Australia a constitutional monarchy.

The regular role of the Governor-General is to grant 'royal assent' or approval to proposed laws once they have passed through both Houses of Parliament. Other powers include appointing government Ministers and acting as 'commander-in-chief' of the armed forces. In exercising these powers the Governor-General must act on the advice of government, usually the Cabinet Ministers.

There are a few powers that do not require the Governor-General to act on the advice of government. These are called 'reserve powers' and are held as a matter of convention. Two of these 'reserve powers' are the power to appoint and dismiss a Prime Minister.

In November 1975, these powers attracted immense political controversy when then Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, dismissed Labor Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam. The dramatic series of events leading up to the dismissal stemmed from a refusal to pass money supply bills by Liberal and Country Party senators. These bills were necessary to give the government funds for public spending. The threat of economic instability was the main justification for Whitlam's dismissal.

Since then, the dismissal has been the focus of much scholarly and public debate. Some legal and political commentators argue the dismissal was unconstitutional. Others argue that even if it were constitutional, it is undesirable for an unelected official to dismiss a democratically-elected government.

Discussion questions

- From the interview, what involvement did Malcolm Fraser have in the lead-up to Whitlam's dismissal? Was this involvement appropriate?
- Immediately after Fraser's appointment as Prime Minister, the money supply bills were passed in the Senate. What does this suggest about the intentions of senators blocking the bills?
- Do you think the dismissal was justified on political grounds?
- Fraser comments: '... the Office of Governor-General ... does not make independent decisions, but it makes sure that procedures are followed.' Does this occur in practice?

HUMAN RIGHTS AND FOREIGN AID

Recognising that we live in a global community, many countries around the world participate in aid programs to assist other countries. While this aid usually consists of financial support, it can also take the form of food and resources, beneficial trade agreements and medical personnel.

One major justification for foreign aid is to protect and promote human rights in countries experiencing crisis. Providing foreign aid is also considered a matter of national interest. Many argue it is in a country's national interest to provide aid, since it reduces the potential for civil conflict in other countries and threats to regional security.

Australia has played a significant role in providing humanitarian and other foreign aid. Non-government organisations play a vital role in distributing government aid, and also coming up with funds themselves. These organisations include CARE Australia and CARE International, both of which Malcolm Fraser has been involved in.

Discussion questions

- How does humanitarian aid promote and protect human rights?
- What kind of foreign aid does Australia provide?
- In your opinion, are there circumstances where foreign aid should not be given? Discuss.

ACTIVITIES

1. **Timeline.** Construct a timeline detailing the development of an event listed below for presentation to the class. Think about creative presentation that will assist in conveying a sense of what happened, such as images, drawings or alternative timeline shapes.

- The Vietnam War
- History of Apartheid in South Africa
- The Dismissal of Gough Whitlam

2. **Research.** Compare two situations where Australia has intervened by assisting a foreign country either through humanitarian aid or a peace-keeping role or both. Write a brief summary of both and discuss:

- reasons for intervention
- what intervention involved and achieved
- whether the different circumstances led to different forms of intervention.

3. **Essay.** 'Whether the use of force and brute power is an acceptable course of action in political or social crises will always depend on the context.' Discuss by comparing examples and ideas raised in the interview.

4. **Essay.** 'While unelected, the Governor-General is an effective and appropriate check on political power in Australia.' Do you agree?

RESOURCES/REFERENCES

Malcolm Fraser

Indiana University—biography of Malcolm Fraser
www.indiana.edu/~librcsd/bib/australia__parliament/Prime__Ministers/Fraser

Paul Kelly, 'Malcolm Fraser' in Michelle Grattan (ed), **Australian Prime Ministers**, New Holland, Sydney, 2000

National Archives of Australia—Australia's Prime Ministers: Malcolm Fraser
<http://primeministers.naa.gov.au/primeministers/fraser/>

Historical Context

S. Ambrose, **The Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938**, Penguin, New York, 1993

Australian War Memorial—The Vietnam War
www.awm.gov.au/atwar/vietnam.htm

Overview of Apartheid laws

<http://africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.htm>

Photographs from Apartheid Africa
https://www.flickr.com/photos/un_photo/sets/72157614394196933/

Government

The Australian Nation—Discovering Democracy (Curriculum Corporation)
www.curriculum.edu.au/democracy/ddunits/index.htm

Online version of Machiavelli's **The Prince**
www.constitution.org/mac/prince00.htm

SBS Online—The Whitlam Dismissal <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/10/21/how-whitlam-dismissal-came-about>

Humanitarian Aid

Australian Agency for International Development (AUSAid)
<http://dfat.gov.au/aid/pages/australias-aid-program.aspx>