**Overview**

**A change in mood on slavery**  
Around 1830 a dramatic change took place in London in the way people thought and acted in relation to slavery. This was when the anti-slavery campaign reached its peak (it had been active for several decades previously). Members of the British public had become aware of gruesome accounts arising from the slave trade. As a result, one-and-a-half million people signed petitions calling for the abolition of slavery.

Missionaries and humanitarians went further than this, and began agitating on behalf of people whose lands had been taken over and colonised as part of the British Empire. Those who had been to the colonies and returned, or who had written letters home, made the British public increasingly aware of these distant events and of the ways the original inhabitants of these lands were being forced out.

**1835 - a new British government**  
The year 1835 brought a significant event: a new Liberal government was elected and prominent members of the anti-slavery movement were installed in positions of power and influence in Westminster.

These changes can also be placed in other contexts: of changes to governments and attitudes in Europe, of reform and broadening of the franchise in some countries, and in terms of nineteenth-century shifts in empire, not only involving Britain.

At the Colonial Office, men such as Lord Glenelg and James Stephen tried to ensure that Aboriginal rights were considered in planning a new colony for South Australia. A clear message that Aboriginal people had legal rights as subjects of the crown was sent from London to Australia.

The message was largely ignored. Australia was a long way from London, not only in distance, but in the time it took for correspondence to travel. Private entrepreneurs behind the South Australian venture engaged in manoeuvres to avoid any costly recognition of the rights of Aboriginal people.

Meanwhile, in New South Wales, officials were more influenced by reports of Aboriginal resistance to the taking of land than by directives from London. A squatter land rush was underway in the north of New South Wales, with new squatters flouting the Crown's control of land grants. Some officials were sympathetic to the squatters, and were determined to prevent Aboriginal people fighting to retain this land.

**Waterloo Creek and Myall Creek**

In January 1838, Major James Winniet Nunn, commandant of mounted police in the Sydney district, was despatched north with a detachment of armed men. He rode for eight weeks through remote bush country and although details of this campaign are sketchy, it became clear that at a place labeled Waterloo Creek, Nunn and his men attacked an encampment of Kamilaroi (pronounced Gam-il-roy).

These officers committed what may have been one of the largest mass murders in Australian history. It was the fiftieth anniversary of non-Aboriginal settlement in the colony.

Nunn returned to Sydney to find a new Governor of New South Wales in residence. Sir George Gipps was a Christian Evangelical who had strong feelings about humanity. He called for an inquiry into the actions of Nunn and his officers.

Before this inquiry could be brought about, though, another horrific incident occurred. At Myall Creek, a sheep and cattle station in the north, vigilantes massacred twenty-eight Aboriginal men, women and children.

The murderers were identified and Governor George Gipps demanded justice. Despite the vocal displeasure of squatters, seven men were tried, convicted and hanged. A furious white backlash followed. Gipps was so shaken that he scaled down his inquiry into the Major Nunn's campaign.

Governor Gipps' attempts to reduce frontier brutality and murder were ultimately in vain.

As settlers moved south towards Victoria, the methods of dealing with Aboriginal people who resisted this intrusion changed. Arsenic and deadly secrecy became the new weapons for those determined to forcibly clear Aboriginal people from their land.

By 1860, the government had formalised squatters' rights by issuing pastoral leases, but in the meantime a new, more ruthless and more secretive wave of killing had started.

**1: Lancelot Threlkeld**

By the year 1830, Australian Aboriginal people had been overwhelmed by "settlers", and evangelical Christians in Britain and Australia were beginning to voice their disquiet. Here is an example of that disquiet, as expressed by Lancelot Edward Threlkeld of the London Missionary Society :

The indiscriminate slaughter, which has blotted the colony with the foul stain of innocent blood, has been committed in open defiance of the Laws of Nations or of the more high authority, the Law of God.

Aborigines have generally been driven back to the forests, destroyed by force of arms or have become amalgamated with the overpowering people who thus Multiply, Replenish and subdue the earth.

In this colony, local circumstances have occasioned the total destruction of blacks within its limits, to be less rapid ... but no more ultimately certain than where martial force has been employed.

Lancelot Edward Threlkeld of the London Missionary Society

**Question:** Why do you think Threlkeld felt that the treatment meted out to Aboriginal Australians was, in Buxton's words, 'worse than slavery itself'?

**2: The Missionaries**

One of the aims of missionaries was to 'Christianise and civilise' Australian Aboriginal people.

As early colonists took over large tracts of land for farming, local Aboriginal people were pushed to the edge of survival as the natural resources they relied upon in order to live were depleted and fouled by livestock and agriculture. The fight over land led to battles, wars and massacres where Koori people often came off second best when confronted with the more effective weaponry of the Europeans.

However, the British Government and colonial humanitarians were concerned about the fate of Aboriginal people as settlement progressed. After the failure of an early Protectorate system, the Victorian Colonial Government decided to allocate reserves of land variously known as stations, missions or reserves on which Aboriginal people could live. While the Government ran some Aboriginal stations, others were in the control of missionaries such as those of the Anglican or Moravian Churches. Regardless of their secular or religious management, life on Aboriginal stations revolved around efforts to control and ‘civilise’ Aboriginal people. <http://www.abc.net.au/missionvoices/general/missions_and_reserves_background/default.htm>

**Questions:**

1. Why did the Aboriginal Australians often come off second best to the British colonists?
2. Why do you think that the British Government and colonial humanitarians were concerned about the fate of Aboriginal people?

<http://www.abc.net.au/frontier/>

1. List the reasons why Aboriginal people resisted settlement of their lands.

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2 Write sentences explaining the importance of the following people and groups in the struggle between Aboriginal people and European settlers.

a Lord Glenelg and James Stephen

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b Governor Gipps

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c Lancelot Edward Threlkeld

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