Across the Seas

Australia’s Response to Refugees: A History

KLAUS NEUMANN

‘Klaus Neumann has written a humane, engrossing book imbued with the awareness that in telling the history of Australia, one tells the story of immigration ... he has brought to this book a novelty of approach and a freshness of perception.’—Tom Keneally

‘A riveting book, vast in scope and timely.’—Arnold Zable

Asylum seekers, ‘boat people’, refugees—this hot-button issue fuels the Australian political news cycle. But the daily reports and political promises lack the historical context that would allow for informed debate. Have we ever taken our fair share of refugees? Have our past responses been motivated by humanitarian concerns or economic self-interest? Is the influx of ‘boat people’ over the last 15 years really unprecedented?

In this eloquent and informative book, historian Klaus Neumann examines both government policy and public attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers since Federation. He places the Australian story in the context of global refugee movements, and international responses to them. Neumann examines many case studies, including the resettlement of displaced persons from European refugee camps after WWI, and the panic generated by the arrival of Vietnamese asylum seekers during the 1977 federal election campaign.

Neumann aims to inspire more creative thinking about current refugee and asylum-seeker policy. Including the individual stories of many asylum-seekers from the 20th century, Across the Seas is a significant contribution to the national debate.

KLAUS NEUMANN is a historian based at Swinburne University’s Institute for Social Research. His books include In the Interest of National Security (2006), which won the John and Patricia Ward History Prize, and Refuge Australia: Australia’s Humanitarian Record (2004), winner of the Australian Human Rights Commission’s 2004 Human Rights Award for Non-Fiction.