

Stratton, J. (2011). *Uncertain lives: Culture, race and neoliberalism in Australia*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.

Reviewed by
Merryn Smith
merrynsmith@yahoo.com.au

Jon Stratton's *Uncertain Lives: Culture, Race and Neoliberalism in Australia* is a collection of eight essays concerned with the how the 'second stage', as he describes it, of Australia's introduction to neoliberalism unfolded under John Howard's governments. The book examines specific cultural shifts in relation to race, ethnicity, and border and population management. Stratton discusses the cultural implications of how Howard's neoliberal reforms undermined state citizenship by mitigating policies concerned with social groups, such as multiculturalism. Here, Stratton argues, Howard's aim was to reduce the social to an aggregate of competitive individuals engaged in a contractual relationship with the state and the market. This produced the reconstitution of a homogenous 'core' Australian national identity privileging a white and British of origin Christian majority. Such a national identity, Stratton argues, is informed by a deep Australian 'racialised order' that "relativises an exclusionary organisation of the neoliberal state" (p. 4).

The book works very well in providing a critique of how this new 'exclusionary system' operates to exclude those who are deemed not useful to the economic needs of the state. Remaining focused on race, ethnicity, border and migration, Stratton is able to examine the specificities of the forms in which Howard's governmentality excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Muslim Australians from the new 'contractual order' by examining the changing role of prisons. The neoliberal prison is one in which those who are deemed as being of no economic use to the state can

be made invisible, just as the camps for mandatory detention exclude those who seek state asylum. Under Howard, Australia evolved into a 'state of exception' whereby the 'national' could become suspended, akin to martial law, and the detention camp was normalised. Here the meaning of what constitutes the meaning of 'prison' shifts to sit alongside the detention camp with each on either side of the border.

This book provides an important critical analysis of the Howard era exploring the personal implications of economic fundamentalism in the everyday lived experiences of Australians. The collection would sit very well with other works seeking to examine the ways in which other groups, such as sole parents for example, were excluded within under the Howard regime. The book is very accessible and would make a good addition to an undergraduate and postgraduate reading list; in particular, the introduction provides a concise historical overview that would be ideal reading for second or third year undergraduates. Stratton's collection is highly relevant for students undertaking cultural studies, sociology, postcolonial studies, Indigenous studies, Australian studies, criminology, community and social psychology, arts and social science courses.