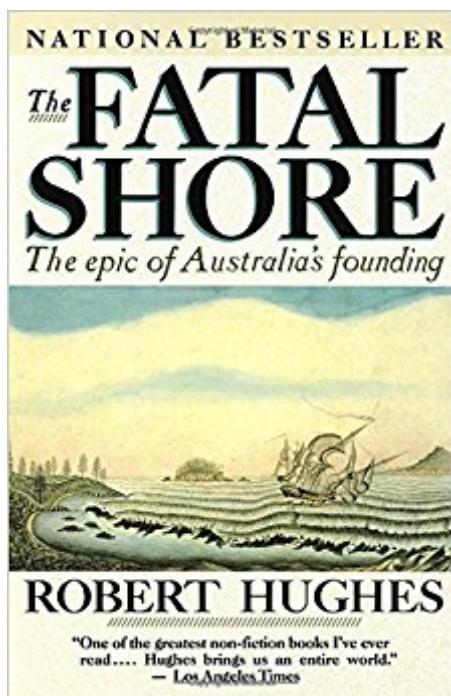


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# The Fatal Shore: The Epic Of Australia's Founding



## **Synopsis**

In this bestselling account of the colonization of Australia, Robert Hughes explores how the convict transportation system created the country we know today. Digging deep into the dark history of England's infamous efforts to move 160,000 men and women thousands of miles to the other side of the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hughes has crafted a groundbreaking, definitive account of the settling of Australia. Tracing the European presence in Australia from early explorations through the rise and fall of the penal colonies, and featuring 16 pages of illustrations and 3 maps, *The Fatal Shore* brings to life the incredible true history of a country we thought we knew.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

An extraordinary volume--even a masterpiece--about the early history of Australia that reads like the finest of novels. Hughes captures everything in this complex tableau with narrative finesse that drives the reader ever-deeper into specific facts and greater understanding. He presents compassionate understanding of the plights of colonists--both freemen and convicts--and the Aboriginal peoples they displaced. One of the very best works of history I have ever read. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

For 80 years between 1788 and 1868 England transported its convicts to Australia. This punishment provided the first immigrants and the work force to build the colony. Using diaries, letters, and original sources, Hughes meticulously documents this history. All sides of the story are told: the

political and social reasoning behind the Transportation System, the viewpoint of the captains who had the difficult job of governing and developing the colonies, and of course the dilemma of the prisoners. This is a very thorough and accurate history of Australian colonization written by the author of the book and BBC/Time-Life TV series *The Shock of the New*. A definitive work that is an essential purchase for both public and academic libraries. BOMC and History Book Club main selections. Judith Nixon, Purdue Univ. Libs., W. Lafayette, Ind. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"The Fatal Shore" delivers precisely what the subtitle promises: "the Epic of Australia's Founding." The reader, like the convicts of the time, is "transported" to this land. The risks taken to begin white settlement were beyond comprehension -- perhaps like a decision today to colonize another planet. But there is more to the history of this place than itself. This book also taught me few surprising bits about America around the time of the Revolution, and a great deal about the English, Scots, and Irish, as Hughes recreates the period of time in Great Britain that gave birth to this movement of man. The hardships of early antipodean life would be all that you could ask humans to endure if they had only to endeavor each day to secure food and shelter. But these folk had to perform those basics while managing a state of criminals, governing a budding nation, and dealing with rules made by persons nearly a year distant by the best means of travel available. The almost unimaginable conditions are carefully and vividly detailed by Hughes. His task was particularly difficult given the parsimonious records from 18th and 19th centuries that survived, and the apparent lack of interest in the Australian past that existed for the first 150 years after settlement. The author clearly worked on a labor of love and a penchant of need he felt to write this story. You read this book for its history but relish much more. There is a range of vocabulary employed which stretches your mind. There are individual stories that sometimes chill you to the bone and other times make your heavy heart warm. One story he recounts is of William Charles Wentworth, born upon arrival in the new colony, "went to school in England and came back to New South Wales in 1810. ... In 1816 he set off to England again to study law. His aims were large: He would study the British Constitution so that he could draft one for Australia ...". That's a mission statement few would subscribe themselves to achieve. The "fun" of this epic is that the Wentworth story is seasoned with a phrase from Hughes that makes the reader's mind perk up and take notice. He says Wentworth "wound up his law studies in London and went to Cambridge. This was merely to brown the crust, as he did not work for a degree." I enjoyed a great many entertaining passages in this ilk. When finished with this epic, you'll have all the facts you need to know: -Why Australia evolved the way it

did -England's environment that effected colonization -How it started: The First Fleet -The workings of the Assignment System of convict labor -The central or interesting roles played by (a) common criminals; (b) political/societal criminals; (c) Aborigines; (d) the Irish; (e) bushrangers; (f) English Governors of AustraliaPlus you get acquainted with other noteworthy people, historical views of the colonization system, and lasting influences of the early Australian experience. Devour this book slowly and judiciously, letting the writing give you both knowledge and feeling.

Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore* is an epic piece of research that goes through the layers of colonial Australian history by each population that made up Australian colonial society. You will come away with a great understanding of how each group--common criminals, political prisoners, military officers on the outs, profit seekers, aborigines, and others--all interacted with each other to create the tapestry of Australian society.Two critiques, however. First, the book is not chronological and at times my head spun from the many jumps in time and location. I found myself flipping back to earlier chapters as I worked through the book to remind myself what happened in a given decade. Second, I felt like the author lost steam in his narrative about 1/4 to 1/2 way through each section. He presents a great deal of information but the reading is tedious at times.All in all, a very good read!

This account of the first 100 years after England began transporting its convicts to Australia is based on original sources and careful research and convincingly demonstrates the cruelty and ruthlessness of this penal experiment, both for the prisoners and for the original occupants of the land chosen for this purpose. It perhaps contains too much detail on the sufferings of the unfortunate people involved, which makes it a harrowing chronicle and rather bleak to read in many places. Nevertheless one cannot escape the conclusion that after Australia's mineral riches had been uncovered in the 1850's, the Aborigine population had been suppressed to such an extent that they had no chance to share in the cornucopia. A sad but well-told story of imperial exploitation.

... and I wasn't originally much interested in the history of Australia. A friend recommended this, however, and I'm currently reading it for the second time. Hughes is best known as an art critic, but he has written a detailed and thorough history of his homeland that I found fascinating. The legend is that Australia was colonized by worthless convicts; the reality is much more complex and interesting. I learned more about the English system of justice in 18th and early 19th century here than I'd ever known before and than I ever expected to. He provides such insight into the lives of

Australians at every level of society, often in their own words, that the complexity of the country and its people are vivid and immediate. It's sometimes heartbreaking to read of native people and convicts who were deliberately broken, but good history that pays attention to the lives of ordinary people often is heartbreaking and gripping. This book certainly is.

A fascinating, if at times slightly tedious, history of British attempts to lower their prison population by shipping ('transporting') convicts to Australia. The British justice system in the 18-19th century and its role in over-crowded prisons is interesting in itself. The sadism of the 19th century penal system is breathtaking; at times the narrative verges on torture porn. If you are interested in the topic, check out 'Port Arthur prison' on Google. You will be astonished and perhaps horrified.

I read this story in preparation for a trip to Australia and New Zealand. It is well written and well documented, but it is a grim story. I am glad I read it, but actually I had to start skimming it and interspersing it with more joyful stories. It is a tale of cruelty, often "man's inhumanity to man". But it is a story that needs to be known as the first settlers of Australia lived this life and endured the hardships related here. When I visit the countries, I will have a better understanding of the foundation of their world.

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