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Despite these differences, middle-class ideals predominated in Australia, possibly because many Australians invariably expected to move up in social status, rather than down. Working girls would have preferred not to work; Australians on the whole regretted the necessity for a woman to work after marriage. Schools inculcated middle-class virtues such as hard work, thrift and home ownership; teachers also ensured that patriotism and loyalty gained widespread acceptance, before the war. All Australians aspired to own their homes, to tend their gardens carefully and to manifest 'good taste', but by no means all could afford to do so. Economic position and fears often dominated reaction to episodes in the war experience. Quite obviously patriotism was a less expensive virtue for some than for others. A contribution to a fund, a donation of time to serve on a committee or to work, was easier for people not totally concerned to feed and clothe a family. It was regrettable that an appreciation of these differences and difficulties escaped many Australians, leading them to reflect on the motives of others.

Australians were ill-prepared for war. School texts and popular writers had fed them with stories of war's romance for too long. The 'thin red line' of British troops, 'the deeds that had won the Empire' were constituent parts of Australia's perception of war. The reality proved totally different. The war was not over quickly, the navy was not dominant, there were few decisive battles and little point in plotting the movement of troops on the war maps the newspapers published so enthusiastically. Instead there was stalemate, enormous loss of life, a frightening display of the might of modern weapons, actions against civilians that had seemed unthinkable, and internal political dispute almost everywhere.

Within Australia the war provoked class conflict and religious and racial hatred; it confirmed the male dominance of society and produced massive displays of confrontation. At its conclusion the acting prime minister spoke of an enormous sigh of relief going up all over Australia: such a comment indicates what war-weariness and exhaustion was all about. Because the initial response was so optimistic, the ultimate revulsion went deeper. Never again would there be such certainty in Australia or such a ready identification with the cause of Empire. Australians would go to war again, but more realistically, with no high hopes.