Chapter Two:
National Identity in Australia
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The waxing and waning of Australia Day’s fortunes can be attributed to the changing construction of Australia’s national identity this century. As mentioned in the Introduction, the national day has served as a site of struggle between complex and competing influences upon Australian national identity - those of kinship, radical nationalism and hedonism. For much of our period "kinship" means family ties with Britain, although towards the end of the period the meaning is broadened to encompass other multi-cultural allegiances. In 1970 Russel Ward asserted that Australians could be seen as "the product of the continuing conflict" between contrasting kinds of Australian patriotism - one with a strong orientation towards Britain, and the other firmly rooted in an affinity with Australia.1 Ward argued that much of Australian history could be explained in terms of the complex, often subtle interplay between these influences. Since Ward’s article the ethnic composition of Australian society has shifted enough to allow his consideration of British influences to be extended to other manifestations of kinship. This dissertation further argues that a distinctive Australian preoccupation with the pursuit of leisure and pleasure - hedonism - serves to explain much about the celebration of Australia Day this century. Australians’ hedonistic desires to have a good time in the "Land of the Long Weekend"2 can be traced partly to the bush legend of the 1890s.

This chapter looks at each of these influences in the context of Australians’ ongoing debate over their identity. Yet it recognises that the elements of a nation’s identity - like an individual’s identity - are subtle and multifarious. This was well illustrated by Douglas Cole in his study of the

interplay between race and stock in late nineteenth century Australia. Cole wrote:

The assertion of a commonality among Australians, the appeal to their ethnic unity, was as ambivalent and confused as the description of the new race. It attempted to base itself upon common characteristics, yet it was forced to find much of the commonality of Australians in a kinship whose roots reached far beyond Australia.3

Approaches to the study of national identity cannot afford to be mechanistic. Its influences cannot be neatly packaged into tidy boxes. The study of newspaper coverage of Australia Day shows how these influences appear and subside, separate and blend, gain and lose their significance, like the influences upon the psyche of the individual.

**KINSHIP**

For most of the 200 years of modern Australian history Britain has either directly ruled the colonies or Australia has looked to Britain for guidance and support. The gradually diminishing significance of this influence during the past 40 years is largely a function of the simple passage of time as well as large-scale immigration and its associated injection of kinship-based loyalties to other countries.

Cole positions the British kinship loyalties of the 1870-1914 period as part of a broad ethnocentric feeling of white kinship, solidarity and struggle. He contends that

the British or Anglo-Saxon consciousness expressed itself in an emphasis upon the grandeur of British civilization and the similarity and solidarity of

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the Anglo-Saxon... Assuming the unique value of British stock and civilization, the Britannic ethnocentric strand stressed the kindred nature of Australians and Britons. Commonality of ancestry, heritage, history, language, and literature were used to confirm the common identity of the British race.4

The expression "the mother country" applied to Britain allows for a psychohistorical explanation of the relationship. In the 1850s the mother country "gave birth" to the substantially independent colonies and in 1901 Federation symbolised the young nation meekly venturing from its mother’s apron strings. In his recent exploration of Queensland identity, Peter Putnis notes that the founding of the colony of Queensland in 1859 was an act of separation from the "Mother Colony" of NSW, enacted by the "Mother Country":

Kinship was, and remains, an important meaning generating metaphor, an organising category, used to make sense of this phenomenon. The metaphor brought with it the ‘structure of kinship’ as a determiner of how the identity of elements in the system would be constructed. Queensland truly achieved ‘separation’ rather than ‘independence’ and was henceforth positioned by the system of Empire and system of Australian colonies.5

Much late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australian history was explained in terms of the nation’s infancy and adolescence. This is well illustrated by artists’ depictions of Australia in cartoons as a young currency lad, a young woman or as the little boy from Manly. Richard White writes of the depiction of Australia as the little boy from Manly that "he was young,

growing up within a family relationship with Britain, and he was reasonably innocent and very vulnerable to any threats from an evil, outside world.6

Yet it is here that the psychohistorical approach breaks down, because no historian can determine exactly when a nation's infancy finishes and its adolescence or adulthood begins. Even today one could construct an argument that Australia is still in its infancy, grasping the apron strings of mother England. The language is English. Most of Australia's social and political institutions are British-based. The parliamentary system is premised upon Britain's, with the Queen's representatives still holding ceremonial powers. The legal system is founded upon British common law and until recently the Privy Council was Australia's highest court of appeal. The education system owes much to the British model, with the traditionally esteemed English universities still commanding an intellectual awe in the colony. Popular culture, although under siege from the Americans, still has a strong British base. Cricket, tennis and rugby codes are among the nation's most popular sports. Cover photographs of the royal family boost the sales of women's magazines.

Another part of the phenomenon of British kinship was the flip-side of the connection with a glorious Empire - the stigma of Australians' convict birthstain. Intermingled with the adoration of royalty and the loyalty to the Empire was a denial of one's own convict ancestry. The psychohistorical approach of Miriam Dixson in The Real Matilda7 is rooted in this exploration of a nation's beginnings and the longer-term effects on the social fabric of its

society. To many Australians the British connection served to rattle the bones of this skeleton in the national closet - a convict heritage. Bearing in mind the historical event Australia Day commemorates, it is possible that to some Australians the celebration of Australia Day was an annual reminder of this shameful origin of the nation. Perhaps to deny its significance was to deny those penal origins.

In his study of Australian nationalism over the past century, Stephen Alomes notes that until as late as the 1960s

nationalism was most often expressed in speeches by English governors and English generals ... and through endless playing of the British National Anthem. Most favoured was the rhetoric of imperial jingoism, lengthy exhortations to national self-sacrifice and to dedication in maintaining Australia's role in the British Empire.8

It is generally accepted that this loyalty to Britain and the Empire has diminished in the latter half of this century. In explaining the transition between political exploitation of the British and nationalist loyalties, Ward uses the example of Sir Robert Menzies proclaiming in one of his last speeches as Prime Minister: "It is well known that I am British to my boot-heels." He contrasts this with John Gorton’s comment only a couple of years later that he was "Australian to his boot-heels".9

Few would dispute there were strong loyalties to Britain and the Empire throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Australia's involvement in all conflicts up to and including World War 2 can be explained in terms of its enthusiasm to defend the Empire. At least until the creation of the bush legend in the 1890s, the most notable characteristic of

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Australians was their similarity to the British. The Englishman Francis Adams, when visiting Australia in 1886, wrote:

The first thing that struck me on walking about Sydney one afternoon ... was the appalling strength of the British civilization... Everywhere there are the thumbmarks and the great toe marks of the six-fingered six-toed giant, Mr Arnold's life-long foe, the British Philistine ... These people have clung not only to the faith but to the very raiment of their giant. The same flowing dresses, cumbersome on the women, hideous on the men, that we see in England! The same food, the same overeating, and overdrinking.10

Writing in the Centenary issue of the Bulletin in 1980, Manning Clark noted that, after the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed on January 1, 1901, the official symbols of Australian life remained British:

The Royal image appeared on the coins and on the postage stamps: the Union Jack was blended with the stars of the Southern Cross to become the flag of Australia: the national anthem was British, being as in the past sung normally as a declaration of loyalty to the reigning monarch in the United Kingdom.11

Clark wrote that in marking the inauguration of the Commonwealth in January 1901 "people had whipped themselves almost into a state of hysteria in their demonstrations of loyalty and affection for the Old Country".12 This was echoed in 1988 when royal tours were billed as key features of the Bicentennial celebrations. Clark wrote that well into the twentieth century "children still placed their right hands on their left breasts every Monday morning and saluted the Union Jack".13

The advent of a radical nationalism from the 1890s left some sectors of Australian society in the imperial camp, others in the nationalist camp, and

12. ibid., p. 118.
13. ibid.
most somewhere in between, identifying as much at home with Britain and the Empire as they did with the notion of the distinctive Australian. This continued through the 1920s and 1930s, with the historian W.K. Hancock encapsulating the dichotomy of Australian identity by coining the phrase "Independent Australian Britons".\textsuperscript{14}

From about this time, devotion to the Empire started to be jealously guarded by wealthy and powerful conservatives. Writing in the 'Godzone' series of articles in \textit{Meanjin}, Allan Ashbolt argued that these elements of society were content to see Australia as "merely an outpost of the Mother Country; they were never in search of an identity, only of an incongruous and unattainable continuity".\textsuperscript{15} However, in his recent work Stephen Alomes argues that this "continuity" was not necessarily "unattainable", and that in upper middle-class society, British and imperial patriotism subsumed any Australian nationalism.

Australianness was seen as rough and colonial, British as distinguished and cultivated. Even successful graziers returned 'home', sometimes settling in Britain, and more Australians than any other colonials were found in Burke's Colonial Gentry.\textsuperscript{16}

We will see in the next chapter that the celebration of Empire Day in Australia was driven by conservative political forces. Ashbolt, writing in the mid-1960s, observed that the prospect of England as "Home" no longer had the allure it once exercised, but instead "our sudden sympathy for the Crown is likely to be merely an appearance of loyalty in the same way as our egalitarianism is merely an appearance of equality".\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} W.K. Hancock, \textit{Australia}, London, 1930.
\textsuperscript{16} Alomes, \textit{op.cit.}, p.27
\textsuperscript{17} Ashbolt, \textit{op.cit.}, p.378.
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There is compelling evidence for the argument that extreme allegiance to the Empire has been linked with conservatism in Australian society. Russel Ward raised this issue in 1970 when he attempted to explain differing levels of loyalty to Britain among residents of Sydney and Melbourne. Sydney people, he argued, were more likely to hold local nationalist attitudes, while Melburnians were more likely to hold imperialist patriotic attitudes. He looked to the gold rushes and the colonial populations of each city to explain the contrast, arguing that immigrants to Victoria were more likely to be middle class and hold conservative British imperial values. Such values reinforced a conservatism still identifiable in 1970.18

Ward extended his definition of the British-based patriotism to include loyalty to the Throne, to the British people in general, to what used to be called the Empire, or even, in recent times, to all white English-speaking peoples especially as these are represented by our 'great and powerful friends' in the United States of America'.19

If, like Ward in his "Two Kinds of Australian Patriotism", we were to extend the notion of British kinship ties to include loyalty to all white English-speaking peoples including the US, the evidence in modern society can appear overwhelming ... McDonald’s, national league basketball, the Oscars, ANZUS (without the NZ), and so on. The theme of American influence and imperial exploitation is explored by Stephen Alomes in his study of Australia’s relationship with the United States since World War 20 and Richard White in the final chapter of Inventing Australia.21 It is not a new argument. In the

19. ibid.
fruitful 'Godzone' exchange in *Meanjin* during the 1960s intellectuals grappled with the ramifications of American influence on Australian society. Geoffrey Serle warned of the negative implications of American influence:

> We are happily - or phlegmatically - exchanging one neo-colonial situation for another. Australia has abandoned the prospect of independent nationhood; we are going to become just slightly different sorts of Americans.\(^{22}\)

Bruce Miller took a more optimistic view of the American connection, arguing that the two nations could share cultural values while maintaining independent identities:

> It is clear to me that we shall have increasing connections with the United States, and that there are many grounds for welcoming this, and for using the opportunities to influence America which its character as an open society affords us.\(^{23}\)

In the late 1980s the debate turned from British and American brands of imperialism to the economic imperialism of the Japanese and multinational corporations. As the influence of world powers waxes and wanes, so do the debates about their influence on Australian national identity. A feature of this identity has been its susceptibility to powerful foreign influences. In his recent novel *Illywhacker*, Peter Carey suggested that Australians felt "comfortable" in the company of the powerful, no matter how incredulous their assurances of goodwill might be:

> this, of course, is what anyone means when they say a lie is creditable; they do not mean that it is a perfect piece of engineering, but that it is comfortable. It is why we believed the British when they told us we were British too, and why we believed the Americans when they said they would protect us. In all these cases, of course, there is a part of us that knows the


thing is not true, and we hold it closer to ourselves because of it, refusing to
hold it out at arm’s length or examine it against the light.24

Taking up the same theme, Australia’s first ambassador to China, Dr Stephen
FitzGerald, recently argued that Australia had become the "lap-dog" of China
since resuming diplomatic relations in 1972. He said: "We fell into such a
national embrace with China that at times we have seemed to lose all
perspective." FitzGerald pursued the psychohistorical line, suggesting that
Australia had made "China a central preoccupation, a surrogate mother for the
ones we have lost in Britain and the United States".25

In 1968 R.W. Connell argued that analysis of Australia’s relations with the
outside world in terms of the achievement of an independent nationality was
an anachronism. Connell asserted that even when Keith Hancock was writing
in the 1930s the urban-industrial culture which "formed the tissue of
Australian life was an international culture":

Seen in this perspective, every nation and every area which participates in
this culture is and will remain a province of the whole, a field for the
interplay of forces from scores of other centres.26

The study of foreign influences upon, and imperial controls over,
Australian culture can become quite complex and ill-defined. This dissertation
also recognises the vital importance of a growing diversity of kinship
allegiances due to waves of immigration since the 1950s. If the notion of
national identity is taken to be a reflection of its 16 million parts, then the
non-Anglo-Celtic ethnic origins of a large slice of the contemporary

25. Stephen FitzGerald, "Australia’s China", 50th Morrison Lecture at the Australian National University in
Australian population must surely be significant to the study of Australia Day. By 1978 one third of all Australians were immigrants or children of immigrants. Half again were from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. More than one million Australians were first or second generation Italian, Greek or Yugoslav. By 1989 the growth rate of overseas-born Australians was increasing three times faster than that of Australian-born citizens. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures showed that at June 30, 1989, 22.2 per cent of Australians were born overseas.

The ethnicity of Australia’s population has changed markedly since the turn of the century. In 1901, 95.8 per cent of the Australian population was born in the United Kingdom, Eire, New Zealand or Australia. By 1947 that figure had risen to 97.9 per cent. But by 1986 it had gradually decreased to 86.2 per cent, meaning that more than two million Australian residents (13.8 per cent) had been born somewhere other than the United Kingdom, Eire, New Zealand or Australia. Further, 41.9 per cent of the total population were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas. The implication of this changing ethnicity in the population base is that kinship allegiances to Britain have been correspondingly diminished. British kinship ties have been weakened even more by the mere passage of time. British allegiances of Australians in 1922, for instance, may still be just as strong in the hearts and minds of the same Australians in 1990 - but by now they are octogenarians. What is more relevant to this study is whether the kinship allegiances have been passed on to their children, grandchildren and great-

grandchildren and, if not, what has replaced them. The effect of changing kinship allegiances upon the celebration of the national day becomes a major theme of the case studies of Australia Day from 1955 through to 1989.

RADICAL NATIONALISM

While a strong loyalty transcended social class structures through most of the nineteenth century, by the 1890s a clear dichotomy in Australian identity had developed. Allegiances to Empire were challenged by the radical nationalism of the 1890s in the form of the bush legend created by bohemians and intellectuals, encapsulated in Ward’s *The Australian Legend*. Ward’s thesis was that:

>a specifically Australian outlook grew up first and most clearly among the bush workers in the Australian pastoral industry, and that this group has had an influence, completely disproportionate to its numerical and economic strength, on the attitudes of the whole Australian community.*

The "typical Australian", according to Ward’s account of the legend, was a "practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation ... a great improviser", "fiercely independent", but one who would "stick to his mates through thick and thin".

The bush legend was epitomised (or, some would say, invented) by writers such as Henry Lawson and A.B. Paterson and the Heidelberg school of painters, including Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin and Charles Conder. It was perpetuated in the columns of the *Bulletin* under the

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31. ibid, p.v.
32. ibid, p.2.
editorship of J.F. Archibald. Although it purported to revere bush lifestyles and stereotypes, it was constructed by urban intellectuals.

The bush legend formed the basis of another perspective of national identity in 1915. The digger, or Anzac, legend, celebrated the Australian troops' valour at Gallipoli as the first real evidence of a distinctive range of national characteristics developed from the 1890s. The legend was constructed through the war correspondence and histories of C.E.W. Bean and drew upon Australians' differences from the British at Gallipoli to help portray their peculiar identity. Bean made it clear that he was concerned with the study of the Australian character when he wrote his history of World War 1:

The first question for my fellow-historians and myself clearly was: How did the Australian people - and the Australian character, if there is one - come through the universally recognised test of this, their first great war?

Bean attempted to come to grips with the meaning of Australian manhood, tested to the limit in the battlefield of Gallipoli. He wrote on the final page of the first volume of the war history: "Life was very dear, but life was not worth living unless they could be true to their idea of Australian manhood." Many commentators believe that Australians were simply awaiting an appropriate historic event upon which to hang their newfound nationalist sentiments. Richard White sees the digger as "the fulfillment of all the hopes that had been invested in 'The Coming Man', the ideal expression of the Australian 'type' " He writes,

It was with a mixture of relief and pride that patriotic Australians could regard the national type as tested and not found wanting. With those

34. ibid.
credentials, the digger soon came to stand for all that was decent, wholesome and Australian. With the landing at Gallipoli in April 1915, the ready-made myth was given a name, a time and a place.\textsuperscript{35}

Bill Gammage writes that "the time was awaiting the event".\textsuperscript{36}

Bean used contrast in trying to refine his definition of the Australian. He contrasted the Australian with the British "parent stock", writing that the Australian was becoming to some extent distinguishable from the Englishman in bodily appearance, in face, and in voice. He also displayed certain markedly divergent qualities of mind and character.\textsuperscript{37}

There was an unwillingness among Australian soldiers to salute, and an unwillingness on the part of many officers to enforce saluting, harking back to the disregard of authority which had become part of the Australian stereotype in the work of, particularly, Henry Lawson. Similarly, the method of addressing officers was often lax, and officers were inclined to preface "orders" with courtesies like "would you mind?,"\textsuperscript{38} as a mark of respect to the bush legend's mateship and egalitarianism among men. In explaining the bravery of Australians in the conflict, Bean continually looked for characteristics and backgrounds which distinguished them from the British - more often than not environmental characteristics. He looked to various aspects of Australia to explain these divergent characteristics - open air, good food and a state school system which was an important agent of social

\textsuperscript{35} Richard White, \textit{op.cit.}, p.125 and 128.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{ibid.}
equality. And he looked to the outback and the awe in which it was held by the middle class of the cities. Bean’s debt to the legend of the 1890s was demonstrated by the fact that he was even looking for such contrasts in his pre-war journalism which involved forays into the bush to record the uniquely Australian lifestyles of country people. Ken Inglis offers an important insight into Bean’s work when he writes:

In some respects Dr Bean anticipated Dr Russel Ward as a student of the bush legend; in some respects he stood alongside the Bulletin writers as a maker of the legend.40

The bush legend was transformed into the Anzac, or digger, legend of Australian identity when Bean wrote of the landing at Gallipoli, that on April 25, 1915, "the consciousness of Australian nationhood was born".41 Although it originated from the bush legend, the Anzac legend took on its own life and became what historian Bill Gammage argues is the strongest national tradition in twentieth century Australia.42 There was ample evidence of the links between the bush and Anzac legends. Military life contained similarities to pastoral and bush life: it was a predominantly male, transitory, innovative lifestyle.43

Despite its reliance on contrasts to the British, the radical nationalist influence should not be misconstrued as being in competition with British kinship ties. On the contrary, it highlighted the complexities of national identity in that it was used by many to reinforce a loyalty to King and Empire. After all, the bulk of the troops saw themselves as defending the Empire. But

39. ibid, p.27.
40. ibid, p.28.
41. ibid, p.29.
42. Gammage, op.cit., p.56.
by the end of the war a distinct change had occurred in the balance of Australian loyalties to the nation, Britain and the Empire. Serle notes that

from then on all classes and sections were to feel a keen sense of Australian patriotism; from then on few Australians would think of themselves as anything but primarily Australians rather than Britishers or Englishmen in the colonies.44

Yet this Australianness could be expressed at either end of the spectrum - from radical nationalist Australian through to devoted imperial loyalist Australian.

Gammage identified two distinct legends within Anzac which further illustrates the complexity of identity. One was perpetrated by conservative elements within Australia, who determined that loyalty to the Empire was the overriding attribute of the Anzacs. They reconstructed the story of Anzac to perpetuate imperial allegiances. The other - the digger legend - was developed by the Australian troops themselves, and their legend borrowed heavily from the bush legend. Gammage wrote that "for them the real Australian was the Anzac, the bushman on the stage of the world".45 This contradiction surfaced after the war. Inglis observed,

Peace could produce no moral crisis comparable to war ... Australians had been exhorted to respond as heroic individuals, to make a single, private decision to dedicate themselves to the nation, as if they could and would, by making up their minds, cast off all those other attachments which together constituted their social identity.46

The Anzac legend was largely taken over by the conservative classes during the inter-war period, although they did not manage to take over the

44. Serle, "The Digger Tradition and Australian Nationalism", op.cit., p.150.
45. Gammage, op.cit., p.63
feeling of solidarity and common cause among the diggers themselves. The new right-wing nationalism involved what Serle called a "schizophrenic double loyalty, intense Australian patriots and intense imperialists both".47 Michael Roe described Australian nationalism as adrogynous, containing elements which could ally themselves with either left or right, "ready to adapt to the most ardent force of the time". He continued: "Before 1914 that force emanated from trade unions and labour groups, after 1918 from RSL branches. But the ideology itself changed little."48 He located Australian nationalism as part of an international shift from left to right between the wars. Further exemplifying the complexities and interplays of national identity was Cole’s observation that radical nationalism and British kinship allegiances were not mutually exclusive: "Though they [radical nationalists] might despise Britain, they seldom expressed anything but a warm and sympathetic feeling for the British people."49

Russel Ward’s "two kinds of Australian patriotism" - the imperial and the nationalist - created divisions within Australian society, as evidenced in their effect upon the Anzacs. Yet there existed this strange amalgam of the two. After Federation, people felt distinctively Australian, but also identified with their membership of the Empire. Richard White described the 1901 mix of national and imperial loyalties as a "twin identity".50 He wrote that "almost every reference to the new nation was tempered, qualified, checked by assurances that larger loyalties to Empire remained."51 All of the imagery in

47. Serle, "The Digger Tradition and Australian Nationalism", op.cit., p.156.
50. White, op.cit., p.112.
51. ibid, p.112.
cartoons and literature suggested the ambiguities of the Australian identity - "a new status, a new independence, but only within the context of a continuing relationship with Britain."\textsuperscript{52} This is hardly surprising, considering that the white population was almost totally of British extraction.

The duality of the nationalist construction is expressed in a different way by Andrew Milner. He argues that around the turn of the century Australia became the site of two rival nationalisms - one an 'American'-style provincial nationalism and the other a Greater British imperial 'official' nationalism. The former was, Milner argues, created by the printer-journalists and their self-consciously 'provincial' press such as the \textit{Boomerang} and the \textit{Bulletin}. The latter was imposed from above via the education system.\textsuperscript{53} Milner's account provides further evidence of the complexity of the construction of Australian national identity - an identity which often verged on the schizophrenic in the duality of its allegiances.

**HEDONISM**

A further and neglected behavioural manifestation of this complex national identity is Australians' preoccupation with the pursuit of leisure and pleasure - hedonism. In some ways the pursuit of pleasure can be seen as forming part of the bush legend. Russel Ward noted that the typical Australian of the bush legend "normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on

\textsuperscript{52} ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Andrew Milner, "Cringing and Whinging: Imperialism, Nationalism and Cultural Critique", \textit{Arena 81}, 1987, pp.68-69.
occasion." Others - notably Donald Horne in *The Lucky Country*, Ronald Conway in *Land of the Long Weekend* and *The Great Australian Stupor* and Craig McGregor in *The Australian People* - took the notion of hedonism further. They identified the Australian pursuit of leisure and pleasure as a key characteristic which helped shape the Australian way of life in the 1960s and 1970s.

In *The Lucky Country*, Horne suggested the place to send migrants so that they could feel they belonged was to the beach - "one of the strongest centres of gregariousness in the ocean cities";

Breaking through the disciplines of organised sport, people amuse themselves as they wish in outdoor games or relaxations that express a belief in the goodness of activity and nature. There has long been this element in Australia of delighting in life for its vigour and activity, without asking questions about it. It has received considerable literary expression as an unquestioning (and anti-intellectual as well as anti-puritan) hedonism, often with implied nature worship. It may be the philosophy of living of the young. When young men strap their malibu surf boards to their cars, drive off to the beach and command the breakers all day they seem to move into a life that is more Polynesian than puritan.55

He went on to note that there was also in Australian life "some of the craving for quietness and slow reflection, where a man likes to sit in the sun and say nothing, do nothing and think very little".56

Ronald Conway described this phenomenon as the "beach civilization" - "a seasonal torrent of human flesh in headlong retreat from the aridity just beyond the perimeter of the suburban garden".57 He guessed that in 1985 Australian men probably spent more time domestically with their clothes off than the men of any other Western nation. Conway wrote that Australians’

56. Ibid., p.36.
traditional alternations of outlook moved between puritanism at one extreme and "gross hedonism" at another. Horne, too, saw the traditional puritanism in Australia counter-balanced by a paganism among ordinary people:

When the waves were running right and the weather was fine the crowds at the beaches were doing more than enjoying themselves: they were worshipping the body and feeling identity with the sand and sea and sky. Breaking through the disciplines of organised sport, people amused themselves as they wished in outdoor games or relaxation that expressed a belief in the goodness of activity and nature. There had long been this element in Australia of delighting in life for its vigour and activity, without asking questions.

Craig McGregor describes "a purposeful hedonism" as the most widespread characteristic of Australians. In a comment which finds ready support in this thesis, McGregor argues that beaches, sunshine and "a predilection for public holidays" gave Australians a "picnic-day attitude towards life". He continues,

A friend of mine suggests All the Fine Young Hedonists as a title for his contemporaries ... in the end Australians prefer having a good time to anything else. It's the pleasures of life - sunshine, beer and sex - which count, not the responsibilities. Existence is not for achieving something but simply for enjoying ... the Australian race is engaged in a wholehearted pursuit of happiness without guilt and has insulated itself against the demands of success and ambition by developing an easygoing, leisurely, apparently carefree approach to things which often infuriates overseas visitors.

More recently, the journalist John Pilger added to the recognition of hedonism as an important behavioural manifestation of national identity. He too related the pursuit of leisure and pleasure to the lure of sun and sand,

58. ibid, p.219.
61. ibid.
linking hedonism with another characteristic of the bush legend - egalitarianism. Pilger describes the beach as "Australia’s true democracy",

The truth is that we Australians did not derive our freedom from bewigged Georgian founding fathers and their tablets of good intentions. There was no antipodean Gettysburg. We are still finding our freedom among condoms on the sand and joggers on the dole, ‘banana lizards’ on parole and others on illicit business, ageing ‘hot doggers’ and gays eyeing lifesavers and mums with ‘toddlers’ and tourists from Osaka. In short, we have found our freedom by taking our clothes off and doing nothing of significance, and by over the years refining and elevating this state of idleness to a ‘culture’ now regarded highly in the world’s most fashionable places.62

Pilger writes that Australians’ passion for pleasure on the beach has served to break down social barriers and has even served as a venue for multiculturalism, with diverse ethnic groups enjoying the sun and the sand together.63 He writes that "grey, tight-lipped Australia ended at the beach promenade, where the nation’s lascivious, hedonistic alter ego took over".64 His words echoed those of McGregor, who identified a 1960s "beach generation" who exaggerated "national tendencies towards hedonism, a love of sport, and a yearning for a life in the sun".65

Horne proposed that, apart from family life, there were three main pastimes open to Australian people - "drink, sport and talking about money".66 The second, the love of sport, captured the imagination of Ian Turner in the first of the ‘Godzone’ series of articles in Meanjin in 1966. Turner described the cult of sport as a uniquely cross-class phenomenon. He argued that in other cultures intellectuals disdained spectator sport or confined their

63. ibid., p.12.
64. ibid., p.13.
66. ibid., p.37.
spectating to a few approved sports, such as cricket, while "Here, intellectuals will be found on the flat or in the outer, sharing the hopes and dreams of the millions."  

In his study of the differences between economic prosperity in the United States and Australia, Sterling Kernek touched upon hedonism as one explanation for the contrasts. He noted that while Americans were noted for their pace of living and their emphasis on success, Australians tended to favour leisure and the "creature comforts":

Where Americans have stressed a serious and industrious attitude toward work, Australians have approved of the more easy-going attitude expressed in the idioms "near enough" or "she'll be right"... And where the American version of equality means opportunity to traverse many levels of the success ladder ... the Australian version includes a much greater measure of levelling in its desire for "equality of enjoyment".  

Hedonism serves as one explanation of why Australia Day has been deemed by many as a failure - because Australians were more concerned with having a good time and enjoying a public holiday than with celebrating the anniversary of white settlement in Australia.

Much of the difference between these interpretations of national identity can be explained by looking at the attempts to define the Australian character by finding either similarities or contrasts with the British (and later with other nationalities). The imperial allegiance relied upon Australians celebrating characteristics shared with the British. These included a common Anglo-

Saxon heritage, a common membership of the British Empire and a common language. Radical nationalism - and later the digger or Anzac legends - was partly based on *contrasting* Australians to the British. Australian soldiers were purportedly more egalitarian in their military structures, held little respect for military discipline and were bonded by a loyalty to their mates rather than to their superiors. Similarly, we have seen from Kernek’s work, that the hedonist manifestation is premised upon contrasts with other cultures’ approaches to work and leisure. This concern with difference in identifying ourselves sits comfortably with anthropologist Anthony Cohen’s thesis that one way the members of a community identify themselves is through highlighting characteristics which distinguish them from others.\(^{69}\)

The influences highlighted in this chapter are by no means the only considerations in Australian national identity. They have been chosen because they stand out as influences which best serve to highlight the fundamental complexities and contradictions which surfaced during the celebration and reportage of Australia Day this century.

The issue needs to be addressed as to whether such influences upon national identity are simply invented for the manipulation by the socially powerful, or whether they must strike a chord of "genuine popular resonance" as raised by Eric Hobsbawm in his discussion of invented tradition. For one recent Australian conspiracy theorist, Richard White, in *Inventing Australia*\(^ {70} \), the idea of "genuine popular resonance" does not seriously arise. White argues that such inventions of Australian identity have been constructed to meet the identifiable political needs of the inventors, who are normally people with


\(^{70}\) White, *op.cit.*
considerable political and economic power. He does not allow for the possibility of other factors coming into play, such as whether the constructed identity strikes a genuine chord of popular appeal.

White’s theory of this “invented Australia” has struck its own chord with historians in the 1980s. Graeme Turner, Stephen Alomes and Stephen Shortus are just three examples of writers who have accepted White’s thesis that national identity is merely constructed by the socially and politically powerful to meet political or commercial ends.

The case studies considered in later chapters of this dissertation will serve to support Hobsbawm’s position on this: although some degree of manipulation of national identity undoubtedly occurs, there are far more unsuccessful attempts at this than successful ones. In the end, a celebratory tradition such as Australia Day, which is an invention or a social construct, must strike a chord in the Australian community before it gains general acceptance as a significant event on the national calendar.