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Australia Day - January 26 - is the anniversary of the day Governor Phillip took formal possession of New South Wales in 1788. In a sunset ceremony Phillip and his officers toasted the King and the royal family and the success of the new colony.¹ Thus, Australia Day was born in a spirit of hedonism and allegiance to Britain.

Phillip first celebrated the occasion as an anniversary in 1791,² and the day continued to be celebrated under various names from the beginning of the nineteenth century.³ Until it was officially celebrated as "Australia Day" in 1932 the day was known variously as First Landing Day, Foundation Day, Anniversary Day, Commemoration Day and A.N.A. Day (after the Australian Natives Association which campaigned vigorously for its celebration). Mackaness cites various references in the *Sydney Gazette* from 1817 recording formal celebrations, including vice-regal dinners and regattas,⁴ while Inglis notes that it was being mentioned in almanacs from 1804.⁵ On January 26, 1808, Major Johnston had Governor Bligh arrested and declared himself Lieutenant-Governor.⁶ Ten years later Governor Macquarie ordered an official celebration of the day,⁷ and his wife organised a celebration ball.⁸

In 1825 William Charles Wentworth hosted a party of ex-convicts and native-born colonists who met at Hill’s Tavern in Sydney to celebrate the 37th

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⁵ Inglis, *op. cit.*, p.25.
anniversary of the colony. The toasts included "the land, boys, we live in". In 1827 Wentworth gave the day a political agenda, organising a public meeting to petition the King and the British Parliament for trial by jury and an elected legislature. From 1828 there were boat races on Sydney Harbour honouring Anniversary Day. From an early stage it was also a day of church services and public dinners. Atkinson and Aveling note that

the principal person at such dinners was normally liberty's darling, Wentworth, who gloried in the company of his fellow patriots, ex-convict and native-born. However, in 1837 a number of the leading native-born, calling themselves 'United Australians', had organised their own dinner, to which only native-born men were invited.

Although Wentworth and his cronies injected an almost nationalist flavour to their celebration, and the Australian Natives Association continued the theme into the twentieth century, for many the day had become as much a celebration of Empire as of nation. This applied even after it took on the tag Australia Day in 1932 and it was agreed by State Premiers that the public holiday to mark Australia Day would be held on the Monday following January 26 each year (unless that day itself fell on a Monday). Despite this move towards what the Age called an "increasing sense of nationhood", Manning Clark notes that at all functions to celebrate the day "prominent men still spoke of Australia and the Empire";

The first Australian-born Governor-General, Sir Isaac Isaacs, told Australians their common thought on that day was 'of loyalty ... to the King... [as] a symbol and guarantee of the stability of the Empire as a sound and reliable political structure'.

10. ibid.
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Australia Day can be seen as a recently invented tradition, with various organisations, rituals and ceremonies being instigated in attempts to help it strike that chord of genuine popular resonance. There has been a large-scale invention of tradition and ritual associated with Australia Day, particularly during the past two decades.

A Victorian Australia Day Council was formed at a meeting in Melbourne Town Hall on October 31, 1946, sponsored by the Australian Natives Association. The Fraser Government established a National Australia Day Committee in 1979, which became the National Australia Day Council in 1984. Each State formed its own Australia Day Council if there was not one operating already. These councils set about constructing their own rituals and ceremonies in attempts to give the day a deeper patriotic appeal. Victoria’s Australia Day Council had instituted Australian of the Year awards in 1960. These were taken over by the national body and re-launched in 1979 along with the new Young Australian of the Year Award. By 1989 the Council and its branches had created a range of functions designed to promote awareness of Australia Day. They included: Aussie of the Month awards to schoolchildren, Citizen and Young Citizen Awards, Neighbour of the Neighbourhood Awards, Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Awards for Poetry, The 26’ers Club for people born on January 26 and the development and distribution of promotional material such as flags, balloons and stickers.

While the Australia Day Council had the promotion of the national day as its mission, other rituals and ceremonies have been constructed to capitalise upon the day itself or the long weekend it facilitated. All have added to the

flavour of the day. For example, on January 26, 1973, the first Australian country music awards were presented at the Country Music Festival in Tamworth, New South Wales. This made the Australia Day weekend more significant on the calendar to fans of Australian country music - a strange hybrid of sound from the Australian outback and the American frontier. At another level, Australia Day bush dances have become a feature of celebrations throughout the nation during the 1980s. On a more official note, in 1975 the Whitlam Government instigated the Australia Day honours lists as an alternative to the British system of knighthoods. Each of these examples represents an attempt to make Australia Day relevant to more sectors of Australian society, a bid to rectify the day’s vacant significance in the national calendar.

Australia Day has also served as the occasion for big birthday parties to commemorate 50, 100, 150 and 200 years of European settlement. These proved to be primarily birthday parties for Sydney rather than the colony or the nation, despite notable attempts to the contrary in 1989. Jubilee day was proclaimed a public holiday in New South Wales in 1838. It was celebrated in military style with a salute of fifty guns at noon and in hedonistic style with a regatta, fireworks at night and a dance for native-born patriots on the new steamer Australia. The public holiday for the centenary in 1888 was not exactly national - people in Adelaide worked through it. Australians 1888 records the vacant significance and the hedonism of the day throughout much

of Australia on the centenary - a hollowness which was to become a trademark of Australia Day for much of the twentieth century:

Beyond the coastal cities, however, 26 January 1888 might have been as uneventful as any other hot summer day. If they noticed it at all, many Australians were aware of the centenary only as a momentary distraction from the routine of seasonal or daily labour. It commemorated events they did not know about, or preferred to forget. It presumed a feeling of national pride among people whose loyalties were still largely parochial...Even in Sydney, where thousands joined in the special festivities, thousands more took advantage of the holiday to sit beside some favourite reach of the harbour, sipping bottled beer and soaking up the sun.17

In another subconscious comment on their collective identity, Australians recycled their flags and bunting and brushed up on their parade acts from the festivities the year before to mark Queen Victoria’s jubilee.18 The celebrations were so centred upon Sydney that citizens in the other capitals and country centres complained that their own celebrations were patchy and lacklustre because their civic officials had headed for the Sydney party.19

The Australian Natives Association (A.N.A.) Day in Victoria at the end of the nineteenth century was constructed to add credibility to the push for nationhood, with the great event on the public holiday in Melbourne being an A.N.A. fete held in and around the Exhibition Building.20 Apart from this pre-Federation fervour, the most successful Australia Day festivities (in terms of public participation) have been in 1938 and 1988, the occasions of the sesquicentennial and bicentennial celebrations.21 An estimated million spectators turned out for each occasion. By the sesquicentenary in 1938 little

18. ibid., p.3.
19. ibid., pp.18-19.
20. ibid., p.28.
had changed since 1888 in the states’ perceptions of January 26 as a NSW birthday. Gammage and Spearritt write:

By choice of the self-styled senior state and informal consent of the other five, the sesquicentennial celebrations were to take place mainly in New South Wales, and particularly in Sydney, largest of the Australian cities and, in the rhetoric of such matters, 'birthplace of the nation'.

Significantly, they also noted that Tasmanians threw their energies into a rival party celebrating the centenary of the Hobart regatta.

Throughout the century there have been numerous debates over Australia Day. The reluctance of Australians to take part in official celebrations was one such issue. The question of relevance recurs regularly throughout the case studies of the newspaper reportage of the national day and harks back to Eric Hobsbawm’s assertion that official public ceremonies can flounder if they fail to strike a chord of "genuine popular resonance". The significance of Australia Day in the national calendar has varied according to the degree of "genuine popular resonance" it has inspired.

While the day started to "resonate" beyond Sydney from the 1950s through its association with migration and the instigation of various rituals and public ceremonies, it was still criticised (particularly by newspaper editors) for its vacant significance. The historical volume *Australians from 1939* expresses both the hollowness of the celebrations and their Sydney orientation:


23. ibid.


Formal designations of anniversaries do not necessarily result in a genuine celebration, and the activities of Australia Day, divided between 26 January and the next Monday, have long been desultory, especially in New South Wales.\textsuperscript{26}

The historical event being commemorated in New South Wales on January 26 failed to resonate with citizens of other states. Else-Mitchell attributes this to the distance between the colonies and the different local needs of their administrations, writing that "They preferred to celebrate their own fortunes and separate destinies and generally did so until well into the present century."\textsuperscript{27} Inglis also blames Australia's federal political structure for the mixed success of the Australia Day celebrations. Different states organised differing ceremonies and held varying degrees of allegiance to the celebration of what, in essence, commemorated the foundation of the colony of New South Wales.\textsuperscript{28} This problem was well illustrated by the \textit{West Australian} in 1932:

It is not, in a strict sense, our own birthday, for it came before we were born... Having since joined the family we now share their birthday parties as well as our own.\textsuperscript{29}

In Tasmania the day was overshadowed by that state's own Regatta Day on December 2 - the anniversary of the day in 1642 when Abel Tasman had anchored off the island. As Atkinson and Aveling note, the spirit of hedonism also dominated Tasmania's day:

As it happened Regatta Day was immediately popular, for the same reason that Anniversary Day, with its regatta, was popular in Sydney. It prompted

\textsuperscript{26} ibid., p.439.
\textsuperscript{27} Else-Mitchell, op.cit., p.5.
\textsuperscript{28} Inglis, op.cit., p.39.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{West Australian}, January 26, 1932, p.6.
some inhabitants to contemplate higher things, their national past and future. For most it was fun.\textsuperscript{30}

Another reason suggested for the vacant significance of the day was the fact that, from the time of its national celebration in 1932 until 1989, the practice was to gazette the public holiday for the Monday following January 26, diminishing the impact of the national day by dividing celebrations and patriotic sentiments between the actual national birthday and the designated holiday. Before 1932, the states varied in the degree and timing of their celebration of the national birthday, with some gazetting a public holiday on January 26 and others opting out of the celebrations completely.

Inglis pre-empted the theme of Ronald Conway's \textit{Land of the Long Weekend}\textsuperscript{31} by noting that Australians seemed to have appreciated January 26 for the public holiday more than for the occasion it was marking.\textsuperscript{32} Inglis also raised the question of Australians' hedonism. Australians, he said, preferred to enjoy the Australia Day public holiday rather than to enact any formal, official celebration of their nationhood. This proved to be a continuing complaint of letter writers and editors in the case studies of newspaper coverage, although some writers claimed that hedonism was a legitimate demonstration of "Australianness" on the national day.

In looking for reasons for the vacant significance of the annual celebration, many blamed the date itself. Several arguments were raised against January 26 as the most appropriate date for celebration. Rivals for the title of national day included January 18 (when Phillip landed at Botany Bay),

\textsuperscript{30} Atkinson and Aveling, \textit{op.cit.}, p.9.


\textsuperscript{32} Inglis, \textit{op. cit.}, p.41.
February 7 (the formal annexation of NSW),\textsuperscript{33} and January 1 (Federation). Whether or not the date was appropriate, the fact was that many Australians had no idea what the public holiday commemorated.

What exactly was being celebrated on January 26 each year? If it was the British settlement of Australia, would this be better marked by Empire Day which was designed to glorify our links with the British? How could non-British immigrants or Aborigines truly feel part of such an anniversary? If the emphasis was on a common future for all Australians rather than on the historical origins of the day, the problem arose of Australians having differing images of Australia and differing visions for its future.\textsuperscript{34}

A.D.S. Smith argues that people identify themselves, according to the national ideal, through their relationships with their ancestors and forebears and to the events that shaped their character:

\begin{quote}
The national ideal therefore embodies both a vision of a world divided into parallel and distinctive nations, and also a culture of the role of the unique event that shapes the national character.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Smith’s mention of this "unique event" here is important to this study, because one reason given for the success or failure of Australia Day is the questionable significance or relevance of the historical event being celebrated - the establishment of British settlement in Australia. Smith might argue that if the citizens did not find the historical event being celebrated as relevant to their own view of nation a national day commemorating such an event would not evoke significant patriotic feeling. On the other hand, one explanation for

\textsuperscript{34} Griffith University School of Humanities, \textit{Defining Australia - Course HP01a} (course notes), Griffith University, 1983, p.14.
Australia Day's recent resurgence, particularly the way ethnic Australians have warmly embraced it, is that at last the day is becoming significant, partly as a celebration of migration to Australia. After all, the historical event itself can be interpreted as marking Australia's first wave of European migration. Recently introduced laws, ceremonies and rituals reinforce this interpretation. On January 26, 1949 the Nationality and Citizenship Act (1948) became law. This created the status of "Australian citizen" which was automatically acquired by people nationalised in Australia. From the 1950s citizenship ceremonies were conducted throughout the nation on Australia Day, ethnic groups took part in Australia Day parades, and Prime Ministers used their Australia Day addresses to praise the contributions of new Australians. When the Australia Day Council was first formed in 1946 it espoused ANA-style principles, including a commitment to a White Australia. But by 1963 it was already being recognised that migrants could inject some meaning into the national day celebrations:

The celebration of Australia Day is now becoming more widespread, with the holding of a consular reception, pageantry at race meetings, surf carnivals, processions, flag-raising ceremonies and other outdoor functions to mark the occasion. It may be that the rather more demonstrative nature of the New Australian migrants will give an added impetus to this trend, some boost, as it were, to the more phlegmatic Australian temperament.

By 1989 its NSW branch had incorporated a multicultural theme in its statement of four objectives. The second read: "to create a meaningful concept

37. See case studies in chapters 6, 7 and 8.
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for Australia Day which commands the respect and involvement of our multi-
cultural community."39

When writing in 1967 of the significance of Australia Day, Inglis
recognised that the national day was sometimes manipulated for political
purposes, though he stopped short of saying that such motivations were the
only forces which came into play. He wrote:

26 January waxed when campaigners for federation took it up, and waned
when the Commonwealth of Australia was achieved. One can imagine the
day being taken up again, for example, by some body of patriots resisting
the process by which Australia passes from a state of dependence on Britain
to a similar relationship with the United States.40

His words were prophetic, because American and later Japanese economic
imperialism came to be a recurring issue in newspaper coverage of Australia
Day throughout the 1970s and 1980s. His mention of the "state of dependence
on Britain" also serves to highlight the impact of the British connection and
kinship ties upon the celebration of the national day which will be a feature of
the case study analyses.

40. Inglis, op.cit., p.40.