Chapter Seven:
Newspaper Coverage of Australia Day
in 1969 and 1976
1969

Australia Day 1969 fell in the midst of a nationalistic drive by the Prime Minister, Mr Gorton. The reborn nationalism noted in the 1955 coverage had developed to the extent that it was being used as a political tool by the incumbent Prime Minister. It coincided with the minerals boom and the Vietnam War and with preparations for the following year's bicentenary of Captain Cook's discovery of Australia. A greater regional awareness was indicated when the Prime Minister used his Australia Day message to appeal to Australians "to apply their energy, enthusiasm and skills to make a bigger contribution to peace and progress in South-East Asia".1 But the war still seemed so far away from the Australian way of life. The Prime Minister's Australia Day wish to Australians was: "May Australia Day be a landmark each year of your lives, on your journey into a bright and happy future." He predicted that Australia was "on the threshold of a tremendous surge forward as a nation."2 It was also a year of flower power and hippies. A group of anarchists in fur coats and Roman helmets was ejected from the Australia Day festivities in the Domain in Sydney.3

By 1969 it had become an Australia Day tradition in itself for newspapers and community leaders to bemoan Australians' casual approach to their national day. They too were caught up in the nationalist sentiment of the

times, but it seemed the average citizen chose not to demonstrate his or her patriotism on the national day. The Australian's editorial pointed to the hollowness of the occasion. It began: "Australia Day provides one of the 14 or 15 public holidays that most of us look forward to each year; and, for most of us, that is just about the extent of its significance."4 The Age described it as "a festival in search of a meaning ... a trumpet call in the land of the deaf".5 The Canberra Times dubbed it "the other day of the year" and said it "evokes no nationalistic or emotional response".6 The newspaper's columnist drew on another stereotype of the typical Australian to say the day was not needed at all - all it deserved was a few beers.7 An English visitor wrote to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, arguing that Australians should put the gusto into their national day celebrations that the First Fleeters put into the first Australia Day ceremony in 1788.8 (The correspondent relied as much on his imagination as on fact - so little detail exists on the original celebration.) The Herald's leader said the day had traditionally been a "perfunctory and fairly empty celebration", but there were signs that was changing. It used Australia Day to launch an appeal for more ideas and ideals in Australia, under the heading "In Search of a New Ideal". It read in part:

The idea of a lucky country - miraculously shielded from the hardships of the world, blessed by nature, sustained by a benign and watchful providence - has been taken to heart ... we need a larger vision - based on confidence, determination, hard work, and above all, a guiding star. To that end we should dedicate ourselves to Australia Day.9

Editorialists for the *Sun-Herald*\(^{10}\) and the *West Australian* agreed that Australians were growing more conscious of their nationality. The *West Australian* put it down to the fact that Australia was growing up: "The process is inevitable, the pace of it largely beyond our control."\(^{11}\) The *Courier-Mail* suggested Australians should ask themselves how well they were developing a great Australian society: "We certainly are moving onward - but to where?"\(^{12}\)

The State Government's representative at the Sydney festivities - the Minister for Conservation, Mr Beale - recalled the bush legend by saying Australians should not take themselves too seriously - "We must have a laugh at our own expense occasionally."\(^{13}\) But there was evidence that Australian intellectuals were re-evaluating what it meant to be an Australian. A full page essay in the *Age* by W.F. Broderick\(^{14}\) prompted a letters page devoted to the topic "Seeking a real national identity".\(^{15}\) Broderick argued that a new identikit for an Australian was needed, "a myth that will recognise the changed power pattern abroad and the social and industrial revolution at home". He urged Australians to look to the future Australian, rather than cling to stereotypes from the past which were revamped in Australia Day and Anzac Day speeches. (He was, in effect, creating his own stereotype of the "future Australian", a 1960s version of the "Coming Man".) In the 1960s Australians were thinking seriously about their national identity. Other evidence of this was in the Godzone exchange of essays in *Meanjin* in 1965 and 1966. The *Mercury's* editorial proposed that Australia Day was gaining

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increased acceptance "as the occasion which most comprehensively symbolises what this nation means to its people." It argued that Australia was mature in many respects, but this needed to be a "dynamic maturity".

The Australia Day date debate arose again, with the Victorian Minister for Water Supply, Mr Borthwick, telling an Australian Natives Association reception that the date should be changed to February 7, when Phillip officially read the proclamation claiming New South Wales for Britain. He argued that children would be at school by that date each year which would add weight to the celebration. The ANA was not convinced, and had no intention of trying to change it. Adding to the argument that the day lacked significance on the national calendar, the *Canberra Times*, the *Age* and the *Courier-Mail* conducted their own mini-polls and found that few people knew why January 26 was Australia Day.17

Many Australians set about making it a landmark in their year for leisure and pleasure. Most of the hedonist pursuits from earlier decades were continued throughout the nation. Australians went to beaches, national parks, picnic places, the cricket and the races, although the editors of the *Advertiser* saw the holiday weekend road toll as the most appropriate lead-in to the article on Australia Day. To them, the news was how Australians killed themselves in motor accidents rather than how they viewed themselves as Australians.18 About 12,000 South Australians went to Salisbury for the annual Australia Day carnival. Some old traditions were revived. In Melbourne, the Victorian Labor Party reinstated its picnic day which had died

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out during World War 2. Activities included siamese races, egg and spoon races and cricket. New rituals were created. For examples, American sailors were given an Australia Day treat in St George, Queensland, by being taken on a true-blue roo shoot by the locals.

At an official level, celebrations remained generally low-key, with many of the invented traditions continued. Perth’s ANA secretary was disappointed that only 13 commercial buildings in St George’s Terrace flew the Australian flag to mark the occasion. Children born in South Australia on Australia Day were presented with silver spoons and certificates as they had been in 1955. About 50,000 people crammed the main street of Frankston, Victoria, for the annual procession. Churches throughout the nation held "special" Australia Day services. Sydney’s Australia Day celebrations in the Domain were notable for the absence of dignitaries. The Australian’s Mungo MacCallum wrote:

The NSW Governor, Sir Roden Cutler, wasn’t there, nor was the Premier, Mr Askin. The Anglican Archbishop, Archbishop Loane, and the Roman Catholic Archbishop, Cardinal Gilroy, were not there either.

The Sydney Morning Herald took a less cynical view of the events, headlining its article "A Day for Australian Pride", and describing the festivities which included bands, speeches, displays and dancing. The newspapers’ own

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traditions of newsgathering continued, too, with the Mercury making a feature 
of the fact that two babies were born at Burnie on the national day.27

But the key factor of the 1969 Australia Day celebrations was the 
changing face of kinship. Australia Day was starting to be celebrated with the 
theme of "arrival", which fitted well with its historical origins. The role of 
immigration in Australia Day reportage continued to develop in importance. 
There was even less talk of a White Australia than there had been in 1955, and 
there was more official recognition of the influx of southern European 
migrants as New Australians. They rated a mention near the beginning of the 
Prime Minister's message:

This is our national day and I give a special welcome to all those new 
settlers who, in the past year, have come to join us and to those New 
Australians of longer standing who have taken out citizenship.28

Nearly 3000 people were naturalised as Australian citizens in special 
Australia Day ceremonies.29 The Sydney Morning Herald noted that "several 
thousands - including quite a few Asians and New Australians" watched the 
ceremonies.30 The Advertiser pictured three Dutch women in national dress 
with the Australian flag flying in the background.31 In the Age, W.F. 
Broderick included the New Australians in his vision of a new Australia:

If we could have waved a magic wand over all our immigrants on arrival 
and turned them all into orthodox members of the weird mob, we would 
have done so happily...Our failure to impose this myth on the New 
Australian has resulted in a culturally richer and more exciting country and 
has shown us how boring and limited the monolithic Australia of the past 
has been.32

Although migrants were beginning to celebrate their own kinship links, many Anglo-Saxon Australians still chose to celebrate their British heritage. This was rekindled in the lead-up to the 1970 Captain Cook bicentennial celebrations. It was announced that the Queen and Prince Philip would visit Australia for the festivities, prompting the *Sydney Morning Herald* to editorialise that "any other decision would have been unthinkable":

> The queen, as Mr Gorton has reminded us, is the Queen of Australia as well as of Britain ... The discovery of Australia is as much a British anniversary as an Australian one...Not even the most fervent nationalist could claim that Australians discovered Australia!^{33}

It was a sign that perhaps feelings of British kinship were being incorporated into Gorton’s nationalist drive. The Queen’s representative, the Governor-General, Lord Casey, directed his Australia Day address at young people. He called upon them to move around Australia "and see its possibilities."^{34}

But it was recognised that there was as much American influence on Australia as British, reflecting the concern expressed in the Godzone series of *Meanjin* articles mentioned in Chapter Two. The *Herald* suggested that Australia had "tended to choose the worst that each [Britain and America] has to offer".^{35} On the British inheritance, the *Herald* wrote that "instead of the tolerance, detachment and intellectualism of British culture, we prefer the more dubious traditions of bureaucracy and inefficiency and a class-ridden system of education."^{36} A letter writer to the *Age* suggested that Australians were already "half Americanised", while another said she would prefer to read about the Kennedy-Onassis affair than to read "some ridiculous and boring

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details of what Princess Anne eats for breakfast, and that Prince Andrew's
sniffles are improving.\textsuperscript{37} Despite her objections, twenty years later
Australians still have a regular diet of such royal trivia in the pages of
women's magazines and tabloid newspapers. Mother England still had her
supporters. Another letter writer claimed the press incorrectly assumed most
Australians no longer cared for the motherland: "But in spite of the deliberate
policy to encourage feelings of disesteem for the one country, and to
propogate an exaggerated admiration for the other, 'There'll always be an
England'."\textsuperscript{38}

The Federal Minister for the Interior, Mr Nixon, illustrated Australia's
changing world view in his call for schools to "throw overboard" the study of
European languages and replace them with Asian languages, culture and
history.\textsuperscript{39} It marked a turn away from British kinship ties to links with the
region. The suggestion drew a xenophobic response from the president of the
Australian Natives Association, who argued that Australia's future did not lie
with South-East Asia, although that region's future perhaps was dependent
upon Australia.\textsuperscript{40}

Aborigines had developed political maturity in their protests against the
celebrations. In Sydney some formed the First Greeters - comprising
descendants of those people on the beach in 1788 to welcome the First Fleet
with cries of "White Man go home!"\textsuperscript{41} The \textit{Sun-Herald} quoted the "part-
Aboriginal" secretary of the group boasting: "We don't know the names of
our first arrivals. But we do know that none of them was a convict." It was a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[37] \textit{Age}, January 31, 1969, p.7.
\item[38] \textit{Age}, January 30, 1969, p.7.
\item[39] \textit{Age}, January 27, 1969, p.7.
\item[40] \textit{Age}, January 27, 1969, p.3.
\end{footnotes}
shrewd tactic to attack the Achilles heel of white Australians' national identity - the convict stain upon their ancestry - to engender guilt for their treatment of Aborigines. At another level, an Aborigine was recognised for his achievement in white society. World Bantamweight boxing champion Lionel Rose was named Australian of the Year. An "invented tradition" of Australia Day, the awards had been instigated by the Australia Day Council of Victoria in 1961.42 A letter writer to the Age was concerned that newspaper's coverage of the Lionel Rose award forced the "more important" American Ambassador's speech on Australia out of the news.43 Women were also treated as a "minority". More than 200 attended the National Council of Women's wreath-laying ceremony in Adelaide to honour women pioneers.44

Political cartooning had matured in the 14 years since 1955. Here was an opportunity for a cartoonist (and a newspaper) to express a political viewpoint. The Australian used a national identity theme to criticise the international travels of the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader in its Australia Day cartoon. It depicted them both as kangaroos hopping around the world, saying "Well at least we've broken away from the insular kangaroo image!"45

The cartoonists were not the only pundits with political points to score. Editorialists looked back to a "glorious past" when Australia ranked among the top developed countries and argued that the test of progress was in comparing the Australia of 1969 with other countries. The Australian predicted that "In 1989, the test of Australian effort will not be how much

44. Advertiser, January 25, 1969, p.3.
better off she is by comparison with the Australia of 1969, but how she rates against the rest of the world." It was an accurate prophesy, with columnists in the *Australian* of 1989 being among the most vocal beraters of Australia’s declining OECD rankings.

Despite (or because of) the Vietnam War involvement, there were fewer mentions of Anzac in 1969. There was, however, the usual military involvement in the official ceremonies. Sydney’s celebrations, for example, included naval and air force bands, air force guard dogs and an army commando para-sail demonstration. Adelaide’s included an RAAF fly-over by Orion jets. A display in Frankston, Victoria, included a sea jump by Commandos. Brisbane even featured a US Navy float in the procession. The *Age* noted that Anzac Day was observed with a "dignity and a conviction which Australia Day fails to evoke". The *Canberra Times* agreed, saying that by laying a wreath at the War Memorial on January 24, the new Turkish ambassador "probably evoked more thoughts on the heritage of this country than all the Australia Day celebrations combined". It was as if the two public holidays were perceived as being in competition with each other for the title "national day". Many Australians were still unable to cope with their compatriots’ easygoing approach to their national birthday, preferring the commemorative spirit of Anzac Day.

The coverage provided evidence of a growing tendency to manipulate the national day for commercial and political purposes. Advertisers had started to

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capitalise on Australia Day as a commercial opportunity, with several, including David Jones and Myer, using an Australia Day theme to promote their summer sales. There was ample political mileage to be gained from the day, as evidenced by many of the speeches quoted above. Notable, too, was the Premier of Queensland’s elevation of the importance of his State to an almost national level. In a style later to become his trademark, Joh Bjelke-Petersen said, "On this Australia Day let us resolve to help build a better Queensland and a better country."

Bjelke-Petersen’s comment signalled a theme of Australia Day, a tendency to use the day to look to the future of the nation. The *Canberra Times* editorialist perceptively noted the fact that the First Fleet’s arrival marked a rebirth for many convicts - "a refloowering on new soil". It was this recognition of the importance of "arrival" in the celebration which was to make it significant to migrants, and give the day a new lease on life in the 1970s and 1980s.

1976

In the seven years between 1969 and 1976, the Whitlam Government had come and gone. The face of Australia had changed, as had the nature of Australia Day. The most notable characteristics of the newspaper coverage were that British kinship allegiances were in their death throes, (despite attempts at mouth-to-mouth resuscitation by a newly elected conservative government) and the national day had taken on a more multicultural persona.

It was a year of contradiction in the celebration of Australia Day. On the one hand, there was evidence of a strong patriotic fervour, with a reported 150,000 people attending Sydney’s celebrations at The Rocks, a resurgence in family reunions and interest in genealogy, and the announcement of the second Australia Day honours lists. On the other hand, there was less intellectual debate over the day and its meaning in the editorial columns of the newspapers, while the Australia Day addresses of both the Governor-General and the Prime Minister made no mention of the significance of the day. Each was devoted to more political ends. The Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, used his address to defend the Constitution (and by implication, his dismissal of the Whitlam Government two months earlier). The Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, used his message to call for "hard work and commitment" from all Australians to overcome the "present difficulties" and "pull together in the national interest to pave the way to economic recovery". The tone rekindled memories of Prime Minister Curtin’s message to Australians in 1942, while the use of the expression "national interest" foreshadowed its manipulation by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

57. Advertiser, January 26, 1976, p.3.
Conservatives appeared shell-shocked by the scale of Whitlam’s radical nationalist reforms and had only taken half-measures to undo them. Two decisions exemplified the confusion. Recently invented nationalist traditions and rituals were challenged by a conservative government which mistakenly detected political mileage in the British link. Fraser created confusion by trying an each-way bet. He reinstated God Save the Queen as the national anthem but retained Advance Australia Fair in second billing. He also restored knighthoods, but continued the recently instigated Australia Day honours list. The <i>West Australian</i>’s cartoonist Tanner depicted a frustrated opera-goer saying: "I’ve saved the Queen, Waltzed Matilda and Advanced Australia - can I sit the next one out?" 58 The <i>Age</i> cynically Headlined it as the "Era of ‘take your pick’ pomp and pageantry" 59. South Australia’s Premier, Don Dunstan, refused to return to the British honours system, saying: "The British Empire is finished - there’s no such thing any more!" 60 Others disagreed. Western Australia’s Governor Sir Wallace Kyle suggested that the Royal family offered leadership 61, while Tasmania’s Premier noted that the nation was still predominantly "of British origin". 62 Most accepted that there had been a post-war Americanisation of Australian culture. The <i>Australian</i>’s cartoonist mixed this with a pollution theme to depict Governor Phillip celebrating his landing amidst a sea of Coca-Cola and beer cans. 63 The <i>Courier-Mail</i> pictured a boy returning home to his mother after an Americanised national day of leisure with his father: "Hi Mom! We had Coke and American fried chicken while we

58. <i>West Australian</i>, January 26, 1976, p.6.
59. <i>Age</i>, January 26, 1976, p.9.
60. <i>Age</i>, January 26, 1976, p.9.
63. <i>Australian</i>, January 26, 1976, p.6.
watched a cowboy movie at the Hollywood Motel, Miami - It sure was a swell Australia Day!"64

Yet the concept of national identity is a complex one, a continuous interplay between allegiances and a constant grappling with meaning. While many kinship allegiances to Britain were being eroded, many Australians were taking a new pride in convict origins and displaying a zest for genealogy. Australians were redefining their own identities by discovering the identities of their ancestors. While seven years earlier an Aboriginal protester had used its stigma to political effect, by 1976 the convict birthstain had become a sought-after commodity. About 250 descendants of the Second Fleet convict Thomas Gosper held a reunion at The Rocks, while members of the 1788-1820 Association were there to give Australia Day celebrants advice on tracing their ancestry.65 Descendants of First-Fleet settlers wore eighteenth century costume for the first ceremony to be held exactly where Captain Phillip had first raised the British flag on Australian soil in 1788.66 While the historical re-enactments took place NSW Premier Peter Coleman used the occasion to stage his own historical re-enactment and lament that the day's former name, Anniversary Day, had been abandoned. His regret at the name change added credence to the Sydney Morning Herald's prophesy 37 years earlier that the day would be known as Anniversary Day for "at least another generation".67 In Hobart a re-enactment of Phillip's landing was a feature of the Sandy Bay Regatta.68 The theatre of re-enactments was one tool

64. Courier-Mail, January 27, 1976, p.4.
Australians could use to invent traditions and rituals of Australia Day and thereby reshape their own identities.

Another tradition now associated with the day was the use of military bands and displays in most State capitals. The *Courier-Mail* added an Anzac theme to its coverage by featuring the naturalisation of a former Borneo soldier who had saved the lives of dozens of Australian prisoners of war during World War Two.69

While many Australians were coming to terms with their convict heritage, new Australians were taking part in the celebration of arrival. The multicultural flavour of the day extended across the nation. In Adelaide migrants manned stalls in their national costumes. The Governor, Sir Mark Oliphant, said national pride was not blatant nationalism, but a force uniting all, whatever the language, colour or customs of those involved in pursuit of a common goal. Premier Dunstan said Australia had been able to gather the best from the world and make them its own.70 Sixty-five citizenship ceremonies were conducted throughout the nation, with 3,326 migrants becoming new Australians. In the Sydney suburb of Canterbury 100 people became citizens while ethnic groups provided the post-ceremony entertainment.71 The Sydney celebrations at The Rocks were organised by the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority, whose aim was to "provide simple pleasures relating to historical aspects of Australia and to migration."72 In Canberra there was a Scottish flavour, with the annual Highland Gathering at Manuka Oval, while Australia Day and India’s Republic Day were jointly celebrated at

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70. *Advertiser*, January 27, 1976, p.3.
the Institute of Anatomy.73 The chairman of the Australia Day Council in Western Australia said migrants appeared more interested in Australia Day than native-born Australians.74

Just when there appeared to be a revitalised celebration of the national day under a multicultural theme, editorialists continued in a half-hearted fashion admonishing Australians for their lack of enthusiasm for the national day. The Age criticised Whitlam's new honours system by saying it "cannot be judged to have excited the popular imagination any more than has the annual celebration of our national day."75 The Sun-Herald latched on to the hedonist theme, saying Australians celebrated Australia Day "in true Australian fashion by knocking off work".76 The president of the Australian Natives Association used the expression "true Australians" in a more positive sense. In trying to drum up support for the day he argued that it was "the one day that is celebrated by all true Australians".77 Only the Mercury really got on its soap box to scold Australians for their attitude to Australia Day, describing it as a "hollow sham": "What should be our national day has become more a national shame...it is sadly apparent that most Australians, in this instance, would put pleasure before patriotism."78 It was the only capital city newspaper in 1976 to raise the issue of the mobile holiday date, saying that "to deprive Australians of a long weekend, no matter how patriotic the cause, is a task that apparently is not politically expedient."79 This issue was to become the key focus of the 1989 coverage.

77. West Australian, January 24, 1976, p.6.
While migrant interest was high, there was still evidence that the day struck a chord of hedonism or apathy with white Anglo-Saxon Australians. In Brisbane, only 300 children took advantage of an offer of 1000 free miniature Australian flags to wave, while in Canberra very little happened because the Fraser Government had told the Australia Day committee there were no funds available for celebrations.\(^80\) The Australia Day Council secretary in Brisbane was resigned to the fact that most people would go to the beach\(^81\) despite his organisation’s efforts to organise celebrations on a $3000 budget.\(^82\) He was right. They went to the beach, cricket, races, regattas and picnics to enjoy their long weekends. Others flocked to the four-year-old Australian Country Music Festival in Tamworth, NSW to see Slim Dusty win the top award.\(^83\) Some critics looked to the national character for excuses for Australians’ perceived lack of enthusiasm for the national day. The *Age* suggested that "Australians are not without national pride but they are less demonstrative and less impressed by patriotic symbols and rituals than most other peoples".\(^84\)

Commercial and political exploitation of the day continued to increase, one signal that the day was starting to mean something to more Australians. David Jones ran three full-page advertisements in the *Sydney Morning Herald* with the slogan "Australia Day Values".\(^85\) South Australia’s Australia Day Council continued its tradition of presenting the first Australia Day baby with a silver spoon and a special birth certificate, although in 1976 there was a commercial touch with the addition of a complementary layette from a

\(^{81}\) *Australian*, January 27, 1976, p.3.
\(^{82}\) *Australian*, January 26, 1976, p.3.
\(^{83}\) *Age*, January 26, 1976, p.2.
\(^{84}\) *Age*, January 26, 1976, p.9.
\(^{85}\) *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 26, 1976, pp.10, 11, 12.
Victorian knitwear company. In Tamworth, Slim Dusty’s award was called the Wrangler Australian Country Music Award, indicating the degree to which sponsorship had pervaded national events.

Political exploitation of the day extended from the Prime Minister and Governor-General’s messages through to the allegation by South Australian Governor, Sir Mark Oliphant, that the United Nations and its Security Council had become "the sounding boards of divisive rhetoric". Aborigines had matured politically. A Black Australia Day protest in Melbourne included a march by 300 people, a call on the Labor Party to endorse black people for its safest seats and an attempt to occupy Captain Cook’s cottage in Fitzroy Gardens. National identity was being perceived as a marketable commodity and as a political issue. Australia Day provided one vehicle for the expression of these commercial and political interests.

86. *Advertiser*, January 27, 1976, p.3.
89. *Australian*, January 27, 1976, p.3.