



In Defence of Australia Day

Description

Soon, we will be celebrating Australia Day. I want to spend a moment to reflect on why it truly is a day to celebrate what it is to be an Australian.

Celebrating Australia Day on the 26th of January is evolving beyond merely the day we remember the pioneers who came to a strange and challenging land, building prosperous and peaceable society which is now the envy of the world.

While it is true that these pioneers were mostly British, we now also inclusively recognise Australia's migration success story, and our land's original Aboriginal inhabitants. Take me, of mixed descent: British settlers and third fleet convicts on one side, Italian migrants on the other. They all came to a young nation seeking a better life, and they found it.

What they created is a nation with an uncanny ability to punch above its weight. How delightful that our national DNA valorises the idea of a fair go, or that we cheer for the underdog. How heartening that our patriotism rarely descends into jingoism, and that our national sensibility is grounded by a laconic wit, and an ability to laugh at ourselves and prick the egos of the self-important.

We deserve to be proud that Australians are a people who will always come to the aid of a friend. Australian soldiers, sea and airmen have laid it on the line to protect freedom and decency in the crucible of war, and we have paid with our dearest blood. We should be proud that our military prowess has not led us to glory in conquest, but instead in the four ANZAC virtues of courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice.

On Australia day we traditionally hold citizenship ceremonies to welcome our New Australians. Hawkesbury Council is pulling out all the stops this year to hold our biggest Australia day celebration ever, down at Governor Phillip park in Windsor. This is an important gesture of support for January 26th as our National Day. I hope you'll join us.

Our message to these new Australians is this: If you work hard, respect our values, speak our language, and value your Aussieness over all other national, cultural or religious identities, we will welcome you in with open arms. The new Australian is as much an Australian as the first fleet

descendent or the Aboriginal whose connection with the land covers millennia.

When my Italian grandfather, Lorenzo Zamprogno migrated from northern Italy at the cusp of the war, he understood that it was equally important to be proud both of where you came from, and where you are. That is why he founded the Marconi club in 1958 as an Australian-Italian friendship club. The club he helped found is now a \$100 million sport and entertainment powerhouse. There can be no doubt that when we choose carefully, people from other parts of the world greatly enrich the Australian experience.

My grandfather's experience exemplifies a great thing about Australia: The colour of your skin should not matter, or your accent or your creed or your preference. Whether your mob came last year, or 40,000 years ago: There shouldn't be a distinction between "first Australians" and then the rest of us. There's just.... All of us. One big family. Equal, as Australians under the law. If you pitch in, and respect the remarkable legacy of our young nation, then this is objectively one of the best places, not only in the world, but in the history of the world, to live and prosper in peace.

I am unconcerned that the debate about Australia day is perennial. It will always means different things to different people. For me as a history teacher, I note that it is also the anniversary of Australia's only armed overthrow of a government, the Rum Rebellion of 1808. As a politician, it's a timely reminder that unpopular governments get kicked in the arse.

Celebrating Australia day does not imply that our nation, or any nation, is without faults. We recognise the deep and abiding connection of Australia's first inhabitants to the land. But Australia day is about looking forward, not back, and it's worth remembering that one of the things we celebrate is that one of our aspirations is to treat all people equally and with dignity. It is not a day to wallow in recrimination, cast accusations, or judge our forebears by the different standards of today.

Australia a youthful, peaceful, democratic, pluralist, secular, lawful, compassionate, innovative and good-humoured country. That is genuinely worth celebrating. And on Australia day, I give thanks that we live in such a place.

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

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