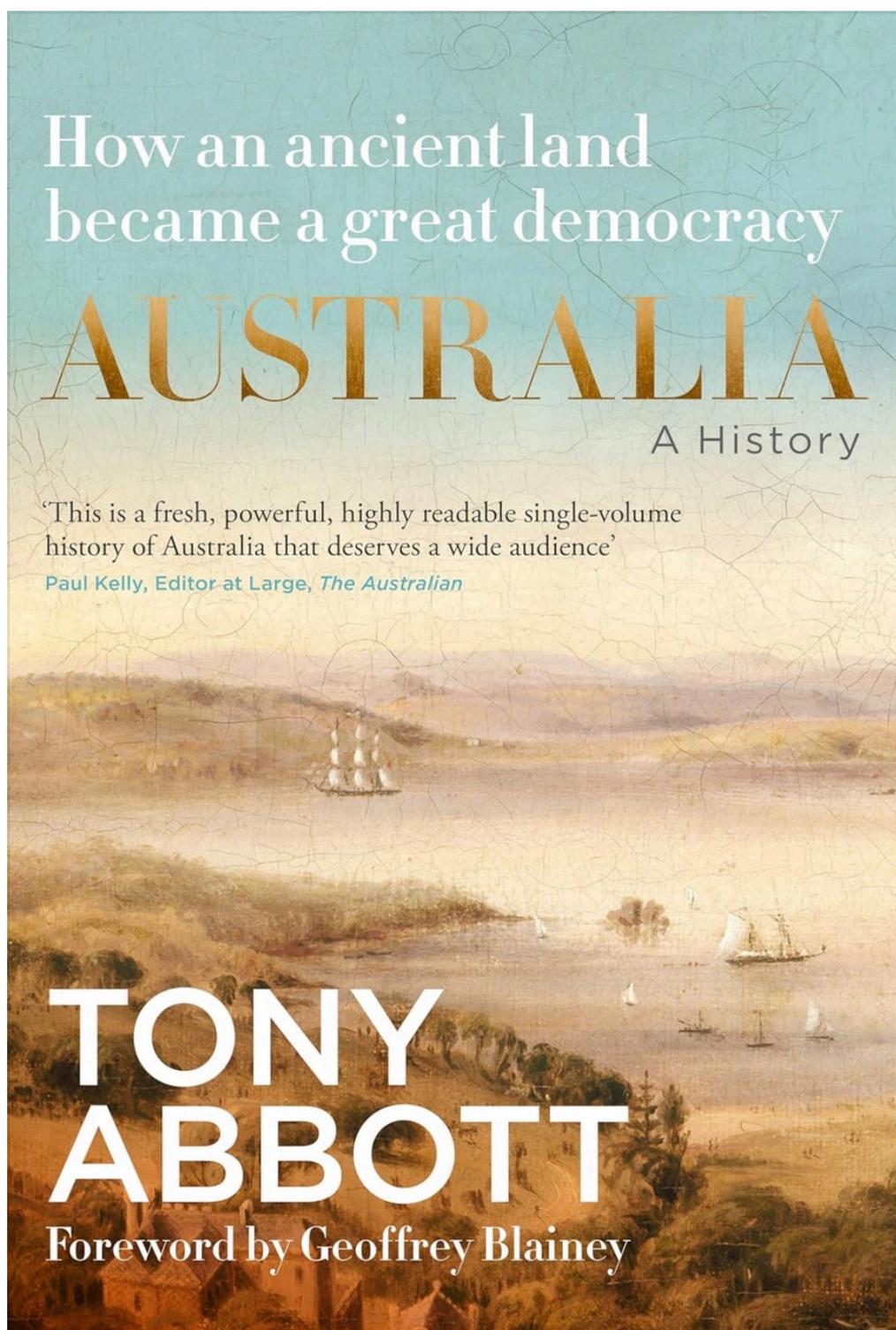


***Australia: How an Ancient Land Became a Great Democracy (2025) by Tony Abbott***



**About Tony Abbott**

Tony Abbott served as Australia's 28th prime minister and was the member for Warringah in the Australian Parliament between 1994 and 2019. As the local MP, he was instrumental in the creation of the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust to preserve the natural and built heritage of his electorate and elsewhere. He is a Rhodes Scholar and the author of three other books: *The Minimal Monarchy*,

How to Win the Constitutional War and Battlelines. From 1998 to 2018, he convened the Pollie Pedal annual charity bike ride, which has supported organisations including Soldier On, Carers Australia and Wandering Warriors. He surfs near Queenscliff and volunteers with the Davidson Rural Fire Brigade. He is married to Margaret, and they have three daughters: Louise, Frances and Bridget.

***What follows are quotes from and commentary on the work above. These quotes stood out to me in my reading. They are not meant to be exhaustive nor representative of the entire book. All quotes are to be read in this context and must not replace professional advice. Note: Any typographical errors occurred through the transcription process and do not reflect what may be found in the book. Note also: Beneath various quotations from the book, I have added my own comments and thoughts. Where I have made bold the text within a particular quotation, it's to emphasise a point. My emphasis does not appear in the original text.***

## **Blurb**

*Australia is one of the world's great success stories: a land long hidden from outsiders, chosen as a convict dumping ground, where - since 1788 - people from many backgrounds have built one of the freest, fairest and most prosperous countries on earth. By the standards of a harsher time, the early governors tried to respect the original inhabitants and to encourage the convict outcasts of the British Isles to make a new start to a better life. This Indigenous heritage, British foundation and immigrant character have shaped the land of the fair go', especially for those willing to 'have a go'. It's not perfect, even now, yet mostly we have a history to be proud of. Within a century of settlement, Australia had not only the world's highest standard of living but had become a global pioneer for democratic freedoms such as the secret ballot, the payment of MPs and voting rights for women. A country largely created by settlement and negotiation evolved from White Australia' at the time of federation into one of the world's most colour-blind societies and has managed the transition from an old 'Anglo' identity to a civic patriotism based on an overriding commitment to Australia and Australian values. This book is intended to give anyone interested - as every Australian should be - an account of our past that's positive, while not oblivious to our mistakes and imperfections as a nation. If to be an Australian is still to have won the lottery of life, the history that's produced us is surely something to savour.*

## **Author's Note**

**"This is the book that should never have been needed.** Until quite recently it was taken for granted that Australia was a country that all its citizens could take pride in, even the Aboriginal people, for whom the 1967 referendum marked full, if belated, acceptance into the Australian community. But a generation of anxiety over Indigenous dispossession, and the academic triumph of what Geoffrey Blainey has called the '**black armband view**' of Australian history, **has**

**left many Australians ambivalent about our past, even though it's far more good than had."**

"A 2019 survey reportedly found that **31 percent of Australians thought that Captain Cook was the first European to land in Australia** and that 47 per cent thought that his ship, the Endeavour, was part of the First Fleet that arrived in January 1788. It would hardly be surprising that a country in which ignorance or misconceptions about its history are widespread should be prone to believe the worst of itself. **In 2023, a poll found that 56 percent of Australians under 25 wanted January 26 to be known as 'Invasion Day', even though it marked the planting of a colony, albeit a penal one, and Governor Phillip had been instructed to live in amity' with the native inhabitants."**

## **Introduction**

"As with comparable peoples elsewhere, it was a tough existence [for pre-colonial Aboriginal people]. **A major drought could lead to famine. Women could be treated cruelly, and infanticide was common when food supplies were low.** This is how Robert Hughes depicted it, and he was certainly no sentimentalist about British settlement:

"... no property, no money ... no outside trade, no farming, no domestic animals... no houses, clothes, pottery or metal; no division between leisure and labour, only a ceaseless grubbing and chasing for subsistence foods. Certainly the lora [the Aboriginal people living in what became Sydney] failed most of the conventional tests of ... culture... The Tahitians might live like prelapsarian beings, illiterate Athenians. Compared to them, the lora were Spartans. They exemplified 'hard primitivism and the name Phillip gave to a spot in Sydney Harbour alluded to this: "Their confidence and manly behaviour ... made me give the name of Manly Cove to this place.'"

Life was not as idyllic as one would have you believe..

"Cook's expedition took on new meaning following Britain's defeat in the American Revolutionary War in 1783. The independent Americans would no longer receive the overflow from London's gaols (it's thought they had received some 100,000 convicts) so a new convict depository had to be found. Early sites of consideration included Senegal and Gambia, on Africa's west coast. The first alternative to be seriously entertained was Das Voltas Bay, Namibia, a coastal site of strategic importance that could be used to repair and refresh ships trading to India.

But the idea was dropped after an expedition found the site fever-ridden, and attention turned to Botany Bay."

The 1600s were rife with exploration and the establishment of colonies. One could make the argument that had other

Europeans (e.g. the Dutch or French) colonised Australia, slavery would have been rampant while atrocities reigned supreme. With the English established order or treating the natives with care and respect, it was through the actions of individual players, often, that atrocities occurred. Let's see how this argument progresses...

An interesting aside from Fitzsimons's book *Batavia* (which chronicles the fated ship's wreck post-mutiny and ensuing savagery off the coast of WA):

"And what, then, of the two men dropped on the Australian continent? Nothing is known of the fate of Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom, and neither man was ever seen again, at least not by European eyes. Against that, the famed "Bush Tucker Man", Les Hiddins – a man with a deep knowledge of both the Australian bush and its history – claims that a camel trader some 200 years later came back with a story about an all-white Aboriginal woman he had met there, maybe a sign that Dutch blood had entered the Indigenous gene pool."

Evidence here, perhaps, of the intermingling of European and Aboriginal people back in the 1600s...

"When the First Fleet of convicts arrived in January 1788, Captain Arthur Phillip, observing Sydney Harbour, remarked, 'When this colony is the seat of empire, there is room for ships of all nations.' This was to be no mere 'dumping ground.'"

**"From about the time of Alfred the Great (849-899), right down to our own King Charles III, monarchs have pledged in their coronation oath: first, *to govern in accordance with the laws and customs of the people*; second, *to govern justly*; and third, *to uphold Christianity*. At Runnymede, in 1215, the rapacious and duplicitous King John was forced by his mutinous nobles to agree to the **Magna Carta**, or *great charter of freedoms, protecting rights, enshrining the courts and limiting royal prerogatives*. Then, in 1258, the Provisions of Oxford were forced upon another weak monarch: thereafter, *every king was required to govern according to law and regularly to summon parliament*, a term first used in 1236 to describe the council of nobles and clergy. Under Edward I, in 1295, commoners - members of the emerging middle class - were summoned to parliament, because the reformist Edward believed that all those involved in paying taxes should have a say in their imposition. By the 14th century, parliament had taken on the form we see today, with elected representatives in the House of Commons and hereditary or appointed members in the House of Lords."**

"The Britain of the 1780s was that of the intellectuals David Hume, Adam Smith and Edmund Burke. It was at the forefront of the **liberal enlightenment**, of the development of **private property rights**, the **growth of markets** and the beginning of the **anti-slavery crusade**. As yet, it lacked tarmac roads, urban sanitation and universal education, but the seeds of all these were growing as the industrial and the scientific revolutions gathered pace. Here, more than anywhere else, the modern world at its best - free, humane and prosperous - was taking shape. It was from here that the First Fleet set sail. This was the culture that animated the people on board. ***This was the underpinning of modern Australia: a country with an Indigenous heritage, a British foundation and an immigrant character, and, as we shall see in this, the story of us, a proud history all of our own.***"

It seems to me that this background is missed from the public discourse. An interesting omission...

## Chapter 1: An Enlightened Beginning

"Because **convicts** in New South Wales had more legal rights than prisoners in England and because they were permitted to do their own thing once they finished work for the day, soon enough many **were materially better off than their family members back home.**"

Who might've thought that you're on death row in one country for a minor offence (and just wait til you hear about the offences), but in the country you're deported to, you're not only given a second chance, you're living it up better than your family back home.

"[The first Governor of NSW, Captain Arthur] Phillip was explicit that '**[t]here can be no slavery in a free land and consequently no slaves**'. A 'free land' is an odd way to describe a prison settlement, but the new colony was unique from its very beginning. **In America, the typical British convict had been taken ashore in chains and paraded through the streets in front of wealthy and often cruel buyers.** Owners of convict labour in America had total control over their purchase. They could prohibit convicts from making money outside their primary duties, which they often did. They could confiscate the money that was made. If the convict's legal status was greater than that of a slave, many who worked tirelessly in the plantations were made to feel little different. **Not so in Sydney.**"

"While Phillip was no modern-day 'bleeding heart liberal', it's abundantly clear that **he did not want a colony of tyrannical gaolers and suffering convicts.** He wanted the laws of Britain transplanted to New South Wales. **He wanted to proceed with 'kindness' towards the Aboriginal people.' He said he abhorred slavery.** In Phillip's writings, we can see the origins of a free society."

This makes sense since the abolitionist movement had gained traction in England around that time (and formally abolished in 1834) and that was the prevailing mindset of many who became the first settlers. After all, they were convicts themselves—much good it'd do for convicts to get on their high horse and declare others 'less than' ... except it wasn't just those who broke the laws of England which presumably had this attitude; it's was those in charge.

"When the issue went to the British cabinet in November 1786, it seems that the mundane questions of penal codes and imperial administration were considered in terms of the deeper philosophical questions posed by the Enlightenment. **Could individuals be morally improved? Could the criminal be reformed?** More and more, the answer was yes."

"Most of the convicts of the First Fleet had been sentenced for what we would now consider **minor theft**, often for stealing luxury items such as rolls of expensive fabric, like calico or linen. Half of the convicts were under 25. The youngest was John Hudson, an orphan, who had been sentenced for theft when he was nine years old. The youngest female, Elizabeth Hayward, was 13, while the oldest, Dorothy Handland, was 82."

"British liberty - although far from perfect - was more substantial than anything on the European continent at that time. As well, the American experience had impressed on the British establishment the need for settler colonies to have a path to self-government: present freedom plus future self-government. **No other coloniser would have offered such a prospect.**"

It is disingenuous to judge the people of the past by standards alive today. That would be committing what C.S. Lewis called 'chronological snobbery' (he wrote about his own case of the latter in his memoir *Surprised by Joy*: "the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? [...] From seeing this, one passes to the realisation that our own age is also a 'period', and certainly has, like all periods, its own characteristic illusions. They are likeliest to lurk in those widespread assumptions which are so ingrained in that age that no one dares to attack or feels it necessary to defend them.").

Today many are rife with this affliction. We think that we've got it all down pat and turn our noses up at the

actions of past generations. But do we ever stop to think about which ideas we self-righteously carry today will be shirk soon enough? We must judge the past (and present) by the standards of the time. And, if the standards were/are faulty, make an argument for the fact. After all, by which standard are we casting judgement? Our own? Or is there a higher standards one might appeal to?

By the standards of the day, it appears the settlers were exemplary...

**"Circumstance, more than doctrine, initially guided the relationship between the new arrivals and the Aboriginal locals.** It is likely Phillip was prepared to negotiate with them; indeed, he had brought with him provisions for the very purpose of bartering. **Initial contact with the Aboriginal people was tense but mostly friendly.** Phillip had been instructed to 'open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affection'. **Any British subject who felt moved to 'wantonly destroy them, or give them any unnecessary interruption in the exercise of their several occupations' was to be punished 'according to the degree of the offence'.**

Now, I have no skin in the game regarding the Aboriginal/Settler debate—I'm a child of immigrant/political refugee parents born here in Australia who escaped Romanian communist rule and persecution—and therefore read this as a student of history. But as with anything, one is not without bias. What I see here is a relatively tame and considerate—by the standards of the day—settling into a new place where some of the locals welcome while others are much more distrusting. If I were there I suspect things would be quite tense... But also, I'd stick to my own and would hope they would to theirs.

"Although a few convict runaways were found dead with the barbs of spears lodged in their bodies, for the first year, the settlement was largely undisturbed. Possibly, the Eora expected the British to leave. For the convicts, at least, **the description of 'invader' would have struck them as bizarre: they were themselves prisoners.** It was notable that between convicts and Aboriginal people there was more **mutual suspicion and less respect** than between the officers and the Eora."

Interesting ... here the violence seems to go one way. Let's see how the account continues.

**"The first documented Aboriginal protests came in October 1790,** after settlement had reached Parramatta. A local elder, Maugaron, visited Phillip to complain about the impact of settlement. From the perspective of the local

Burramattagal people, their gradual displacement may indeed have felt like an invasion. Phillip acknowledged Maugaron's concerns, but - **for all Phillip's humanity - he was not deterred from his mission.**"

**"Convicts were not slaves but subjects of the Crown with legal rights.** Here, a convict could own property, give evidence and bring actions in court. A convict could be flogged, but only by order of the court - a more benign punishment regime than was then applicable to the sailors, soldiers and servants of Britain and Europe. Convicts with a good record could even apply for their families to join them in the new colony."

"Soon enough, convicts were making the most of any skills and aptitude they had to better themselves. **'[Y]ou [must] not think that I am made a Slave of, for I am not, it is quite the reverse of it,'** one convict wrote home."

"In November 1789, two Eora men, Colebee and Bennelong, were captured and brought to the Sydney Cove settlement in furtherance of Phillip's quest to know better the local people. Colebee soon escaped. Over time, Bennelong learned the manners and language of his captors. According to Watkin Tench, he was 'of good stature, stoutly made, lively, animated and full of character.' He soon endeared himself to Phillip. When he did escape some months later, he was found again at Manly Cove. After some casual talk with Phillip, Bennelong placed a spear on the ground that was then picked up by **one of Bennelong's companions and thrust into Phillip's shoulder, possibly as an act of blood justice in retribution for Bennelong's earlier capture. Phillip chose not to retaliate.** He seems to have taken the incident as a misunderstanding, not aggression, and to have understood Bennelong's grievance at being captured and made to live at Government House. It showed, Phillip said, that **'nothing will make amends for the loss of their liberty'**. [...] If Bennelong stood as the reconciler of Aboriginal Australia, Pemulwuy was the symbol of resistance."

Pemulwuy was a fearsome Aboriginal who dished out his own brand of justice, it seems. He was later declared an outlaw, shot and killed, decapitated, and his head sent back to England. Barbaric by today's standards. And yet, even he was respected based on some records of the day.

"Officially, convicts were to work for the government clearing land and felling trees from dawn to dusk, Monday to Friday, with a part day on Saturday. In practice, they insisted on 'task work' that, once completed, gave them time to do what they wished: fishing, hunting, gambling, drinking or taking paid work from other employers."

## **Chapter 2: Rebellion and Restoration**

"The decision to appoint [the seaman, Captain William] Bligh as governor of New South Wales, in 1806, was hardly uncontentious, but Sir Joseph Banks, a

personal acquaintance, had convinced London that no one else could govern such a ragtag colony. What was needed, Banks said, was 'a mind ... firm in discipline, civil in deportment and not subject to whimper and whine when severity of discipline is wanted to meet emergencies!'"

**"It was the lack of a proper currency that had been forcing farmers to accept rum for payment, and it was the trading of spirits that most offended Bligh.** In February 1807, the governor prohibited alcohol as a medium of exchange. Bligh thought the banning of bartering with spirits would provide farmers with proper compensation; but with less 'currency' in circulation, labour costs rose. No single act could have been better calculated to directly attack the economic life of the colony. **Rum dominated economic exchange where 'any little piece of service' could be acquired for 'a glass of grog'.** The effect of the ban was to endanger every business 'at a stroke!'"

"Bligh's language and demeanour made him, in the words of one close observer, 'hated by people who he never really [did] injury!'"

"Bligh's overthrow demonstrated that New South Wales could not be a government-run prison colony only. Officers, convicts, ex-convicts and free settlers wanted to be masters of their own destiny."

The tight-fisted hand of government is overthrown ... and a new one put in place. A lesson for us today, were we willing to listen.

**"new Australians** were distinguishable from their English counterparts by their good health and physical attributes. They were, on average, **taller and slimmer**, and **better adapted to the warmer, drier climate** that afforded greater space and a **more nutritious** diet. While the birth rate was not especially high in the colony, **infant mortality was relatively low** compared to urban Britain."

"The public servant George Thomas Boyes wrote: **You cannot imagine such a beautiful Race as the rising generation in this Colony** ... There is **a degree of Liberty here which you can hardly imagine** at your side of the Equator ... They are in short as **free as the Birds of the Air and the Natives of the Forests**. They are also **connoisseurs in horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, and wool** ... and this they all understand before they can speak that two and two make four."

**"Once convicts had been assigned to a 'master', they had considerable freedom.** They wore no chains or uniforms and were not kept in prisons. They were **encouraged to work hard and were rewarded if they did.** The term 'convict' was avoided - 'government men' or 'servants' were preferred. Under conditions like these, **escape was easy.** Convicts could simply walk off their job and go bush - live off the land, in other words - or, more likely, resort to

bushranging. **Even so, most convicts preferred a regular supply of bread, meat and rum, and the prospect of integrating into colonial society** at the conclusion of their sentence. Female convicts could become the partners of officers, soldiers and emancipists. More than that, though, they had a right to property, backed by law, and **many bettered themselves on their own account, with some becoming landholders**. There were far fewer women than men, so they had a choice of partners and acquired a degree of social power as a result."

"Just as London underestimated the ambition of convicts and ex-convicts to better themselves, it underestimated the original inhabitants' instinct to guard their country. [Another governor, Lachlan] **Macquarie hoped that friendly Aboriginal inhabitants could be absorbed into colonial society and become farmers, labourers and Christians**. [...] A spate of encounters between 1814 and 1816 - likely exacerbated by drought - forced Macquarie's hand. For him, **the worst possible outcome would be settlers responding to instances of speared animals and occasional violence by taking matters into their own hands**. He understood that 'the first personal attacks were made by settlers and their servants'. After a particularly savage revenge killing, he reminded the settlers that the Aboriginal people, 'in like manner with themselves, were 'entitled to the protection of British law'. [...] Overall, 14 [Aboriginal] people were killed, including women and children. The Appin Massacre was the most bloody incident of a campaign designed to control the Sydney hinterland once and for all."

From the **Australian Museum**: "Macquarie effectively declared war on the Aboriginal peoples of New South Wales. He authorised a campaign of "terror" against those "hostile natives" who didn't submit to colonial rule: permitting them to be killed, and their bodies hung up in the trees as grisly warnings, or taken hostages as "prisoners of war". Military campaigns sought to punish Aboriginal people for their resistance, but as British subjects they were also meant to be protected under British law".

And from **Macquarie**: "I have directed as many Natives as possible to be made Prisoners, with the view of keeping them as Hostages until the real guilty ones have surrendered themselves or have been given up by their Tribes to summary Justice. - In the event of the Natives making the smallest show of resistance - or refusing to surrender when called upon so to do - the officers Commanding the Military Parties have been authorized to fire on them to compel them to surrender; hanging up on Trees the Bodies of such Natives as may be killed on such occasions, in order to strike the greater terror into the Survivors."

**Source:** <https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/fighting-wars/appin-massacre/>

**“Companionship** [between the natives and colonists] could [...] go a long way in assisting **mutual understanding**. Often enough, **shared humour brought out the common humanity that two very different cultures masked**. Bungaree - Flinders' friend - was a legendary mimic. Bennelong was another noted humorist. **These are the forgotten moments of early Sydney: two totally different peoples gathered around the campfire, laughing together over the absurd.**”

### **Chapter 3: ‘Not all the armies of England’**

“On the frontier of settlement, **violence intensified** as Aboriginal people asserted their right to hunt, and graziers often over-reacted.”

“Modern **Australia** was never a grand design. It **was the spontaneous product of all those individuals and families looking to make a home or to keep one** - to strike it rich, to make fresh beginnings or to hold onto what they had.”

“From the beginning, **governors were keen to ensure that the children did not grow up too like their parents**, and had fostered the education of those without home-schooling or whose parents could not send them to boarding schools back in England.”

“[In the early 1800s] Juries still exclusively comprised military officers and, above all, everyone was vulnerable to the autocratic rule of the governor and ultimately subject to London.”

“Largely thanks to the emancipist influence, the British Parliament passed the *New South Wales Act 1823*, which introduced a Legislative Council composed of a small number of locally appointed members to advise the governor and approve legislation. In addition, the military court was replaced by a Supreme Court with trial by jury for civil cases. For the first time, the governor no longer wielded absolute power in the colony.”

“as the pastoralists pushed forward into the interior, the Tasmanian Aboriginal people pushed back. Between 1824 and 1826, 24 Europeans were killed; between 1828 and 1830, over 50, often in farmhouse raids. **After discharging their weapons at Aboriginal assailants, settlers typically found themselves rushed before they could reload**. The Aboriginal people could evade the clumsy redcoat with relative ease or abandon their spears to make a hasty escape, in full knowledge they could quickly manufacture more.”

“hundreds of Aboriginal Tasmanians were killed during the expansion of

settlement, a tally that deeply impacted [lieutenant-governor of TAS, George] Arthur. It was a fatal error in the first settlement of Van Diemen's Land,' he lamented, 'that a treaty was not entered into with the natives.'"

"Whatever natural riches Australia was endowed with, the evangelicals feared it would come to nought if the Christian faith did not follow the pioneers into the vast interior of the continent. A convict society must necessarily be morally compromised, it was believed, so the advocates for social improvement were anxious about the convict-fuelled rapid expansion of settlement."

"Governor Bourke swiftly voided the treaty as 'against the rights of the Crown'. Any private treaty was an obvious affront to the government's authority and would open the door to countless similar land grabs. Nevertheless, even a voided treaty testified to the notion that Aboriginal people could have inherent rights in land, independent of anything that was granted by the Crown."

"The founding of Adelaide as a British settlement, according to Geoffrey Blainey, 'was one of the far-reaching events in the history of Australia'. No longer was it possible for another European power to establish a colony in Australia. **Britain, for the first time in history, was in possession of an entire continent.**"

## Chapter 4: Towards Self-government

"If the British conscience of the 19th century had a name, it was William Wilberforce. Through dint of personality and pursuit of the great cause of the eradication of slavery, the evangelical Yorkshireman amassed a devout and reverential following that extended to Australia. He nominated chaplains and missionaries; he corresponded with at least one governor; and was fervently admired by Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie. On their journey to New South Wales in 1809, they had witnessed first-hand a Portuguese ship throwing overboard fever-ridden slaves to prevent the spread of an infection that had already killed many. 'We all thought on Mr Wilberforce,' Elizabeth wrote."

"Since the arrival of the First Fleet, convict masters and colonial authorities had learned that rewards rather than severity were more conducive to prisoner reform and productivity. As John Macarthur's son, James, put it, 'where a man behaves well... [we] make him forget, if possible, that he is a convict.'"

"During the 1830s the area of settlement in Australia expanded every year by the size of Ireland.! Indigenous Australians' hunting grounds were invaded and their sacred sites trampled. **In the pastoral plains and beyond, two alternative conceptions of humanity played out: the Hobbesian view of life as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short', driven by survival of the fittest, and the Lockian alternative of man as free, instinctually just and naturally inclined to co-operation and harmony.** Trouble usually followed a pattern. Pastoralists grazed their sheep and cattle on new land, killed the kangaroos and

monopolised the waterholes. When **Aboriginal people killed livestock and sometimes shepherds and drovers** too, punitive raids quickly ensued. **It was not uncommon for a raiding party to kill the first Aboriginal person they spotted.** Colonial officials were aware of the conflict and humanitarians were appalled by it. One Gippsland squatter found himself familiarized with scenes of horror - from having murder made a topic of everyday conversation'.

Quantifying the numbers killed in frontier conflict has been highly contentious. The Colonial Frontier Massacre Map, managed by academics at the University of Newcastle, claims 421 sites with 11,257 Aboriginal deaths between 1788 and 1930.<sup>17</sup> Because eye-witness accounts and reliable contemporary records are often not available, these numbers should be regarded as guesstimates. What can't be denied is that frontier life was brutal and dangerous, and that **Aboriginal people suffered grievously."**

"compared with the Māori, Aboriginal Australians were more diverse, with a profusion of different languages, more divided, more nomadic and spread across a much larger country. The Māori resistance to colonisation was fiercer, better organised and more effective, and they had a hierarchy of authority that the newcomers could readily deal with.<sup>26</sup> There were Māori chiefs, who could consult with one another and sign such a treaty."

"a party of 11 stockmen wantonly murdered in cold blood up to 30 men, women and children; the victims' bodies were subsequently hacked apart and burned. Word of the murders reached the governor only thanks to an eyewitness, an Aboriginal boy named Davy, and a station manager, William Hobbs. Because of their courage, we know more about the **Myall Creek massacre** than of any other. [...] At the first trial, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty, which Plunkett interpreted as 'they're guilty but we won't convict. Plunkett sought a second trial, reducing the accused from 11 to seven and focusing his case on the murder of a small boy. Justice Burton, the judge at the second trial, was visibly moved and delivered an emotional speech to the jury. [T]he blood of the victims cries for vengeance, he said." The accused were found guilty and sentenced to death. Gipps ignored petitions to spare their lives."

**"Melburnians were independent and ambitious for their own political autonomy.** This made their status as a 'dependency within a dependency' - still formally part of New South Wales, with representatives sitting in the NSW Legislative Council - utterly intolerable. Separation festivals, banquets and bonfires became regular features of the late 1840s."

**"In 1850, the NSW Legislative Council debated a call to the British government to end convict transportation once and for all.** The speeches were long, eloquent and emotional. No other debate had taken up so much time. By its end, it was plain where opinion was. Outnumbered, Wentworth and his faction staged a walk-out. **The resolution to cease transportation to New South Wales passed unanimously."**

## Chapter 5: Gold!

"At the peak of the rush, hundreds of ships crammed into Port Phillip Bay, and carts, carriages and pedestrians jammed the roads to the goldfields. Provisions from around the world flowed into Melbourne. 'All down, near the wharves, it is a scene of dust, drays and carts, hurrying to and fro, and heaps of boxes, trunks, bundles and digging tools,' wrote Howitt. Imports increased fivefold in two years. The value of imported alcohol and tobacco alone in 1852 exceeded all the imports from the United Kingdom in 1850."

"the diggings were rough places. At Fryer's Creek, just south of Castlemaine, it was recorded that 'quarrels, dissensions, bloodshed and danger of the direst description reign supreme'. Summary justice could be meted out, sometimes brutally. Crime was checked 'by an occasional pistol-shot; word was passed from tent to tent relaying the consequences of a bad decision. Authorities in Melbourne feared that 'lynch law' would rule the fields, as vigilante justice had become known during the California gold rush; only one instance of a lynching is recorded in Victoria, however."

Lowe: "Human nature is human nature all the world over; and the Chinaman is just as fond of money, and just as eager to earn as much as he can, as the most grasping of his competitors... And so it will be, after a very little time, with our own countrymen here ... [T]he expenditure of the Asiatic will soon rise to the European level, because his mode of living will approximate to those of his neighbours."

Historian Clare Wright: "The miners were not disloyal to their sovereign, but rather had lost any shred of respect for the minions who served her. They did not want to change the system of government; they wanted to be included in it. At no time did they riot against or launch an assault on authorities. They were not insurgents. They were not revolutionaries. For the most part, they were British subjects denied the basic civilities of British justice... They rebelled against an unpopular and viciously policed poll tax when all peaceful means of protest had been rebuffed. They fought back when attacked..."

"An autonomous stockade in the heart of the Ballarat goldfields was clearly untenable. At sunrise on Sunday 3 December 1854, soldiers and police - on horse and foot - stormed the barricade.

Not expecting an immediate attack, most of the diggers had either left the stockade or were asleep; consequently, the melee was short. Some 30 miners and five soldiers were killed in the space of 15 minutes. Some of the diggers were killed by police after they had surrendered."

The Eureka Rebellion involved gold miners revolting against British administration of VIC Gold Rush. It happened in 1854 in Ballarat between rebels and Britain's colonial forces.

The main problem was around mining permits because, as government likes to do, authorities declared gold as belonging to The Crown and imposed costly licenses to get their fair share from those who unearned it.

## Chapter 6: Colonial Liberation

"Visitors expecting the same social deference as in Britain were often disappointed. Those inclined to be critical observed that 'selfishness', or money-making, was a leading feature of Australians."

"The English novelist Charles Dickens sent two of his ten children to New South Wales, having regularly preached to them the benefits of an honest life in the antipodes. His younger son, Edward Dickens, known as 'Plorn', was a member of the NSW Parliament from 1889 to 1894."

**"In Australia, full adult male suffrage came two generations before Britain.** In 1850, a New South Welshman who owned a small property or paid £10 annual rent qualified to vote. When prices and rents soared after the discovery of gold, almost all men living in town could vote. For city dwellers, this was manhood suffrage in all but name. By 1856, 95 per cent of Sydney men were entitled to cast a vote. In Victoria, after the Eureka Rebellion, diggers holding a licence - which now cost a mere pound - could also vote. **In 1856, South Australia created one of the world's most democratic constitutions: all men, including Aboriginal men, had the right to vote for the Legislative Assembly.**

Suffrage means the ability to vote

"To enter a colonial parliament in 1860 was to arrive at a carnival of personalities, where the currency of politics was the magnetic individual - the small breed of superior men, as Henry Parkes called them, who could command alliances. **This was a system of personal followings, not of parties, where loyalties and factions were fluid.**"

"Inevitably, expansion triggered resistance from Aboriginal clans. Parts of Queensland became conflict zones, but local Aboriginal people had little chance when pitted against units of the **Native Mounted Police**. Typically these consisted of three to eight Aboriginal troopers headed by a European officer. **Recruiting some natives - to use the terminology of the period - to fight against other natives was a practice that went back to Roman times.** Britain had employed similar methods in India and South Africa. In Queensland, Aboriginal troopers were often brought in from country far distant to the area they patrolled in order to minimise chances of desertion. **Some troopers were press-ganged - effectively kidnapped - while others were prisoners given the option of enlistment. But most volunteered, probably because it was a job, with a uniform and regular food.**"

"A growing number of citizens viewed frontier violence as an appalling moral failure. "This in plain language is how we deal with the Aborigines: On occupying new territory the Aboriginal inhabitants are treated exactly in the same way as the wild beasts or birds the settlers may find there, the Brisbane journalist Carl Feilberg wrote. **"The least show of resistance is answered by a rifle bullet."**

"Victoria's *Education Act* 1872 was among the first in the world to provide a system of state education, **'free, compulsory and secular'**"

So far, thoughts about this history are that what started as an English enterprise to get rid of convicts turned out to be a great 'success' story of those same convicts 'making it' in another client, and then working alongside others to blunder their way through establishing a new land with particular laws. Sometimes clashing with natives, other times trying to get along with them. Individual actors often too evil things while there didn't appear to be systemic prejudice and violence against natives at the time. It's almost like it happened in fits and starts ... and way considered inexcusable many a time, even by the standard of the day. People's will to self-actualise seemed strong, but corruption could also reign. It feels more like Australia was a 'project' in the 1700s and 1800s. Let's see how the rest of the book fares...

## **Chapter 7: Empire and Federation**

"There was a new rush in Australia in the last quarter of the 19th century: one of ideas rather than gold. It was the age of -isms: imperialism, nationalism, socialism, spiritualism, secularism, social Darwinism, 'new' liberalism and (Henry) George-ism. The revolution in transport and communications lowered the cost of acquiring ideas."

"Overall, what is remarkable about the Australian Constitution - as it was finally settled in 1900 - was not its racialism, but its liberalism. Its minimalist and utilitarian language masks a generous and democratic flexibility."

"[In the 1890s] the Labour Electoral League had reconstituted itself as the Labor Party, with unprecedented internal discipline, including the **'pledge'** that **all its MPs vote together in favour of party policy.**"

Party politics, as is so common today, rules the day. What about MPs servicing the needs of their people, their constituents? Seems like most parties care more about internal dynamics than representation. Or is this just

showing my hand and cynicism (or is it skepticism) towards the politic of the present? I fear it's the former and pray for objectivity for it to become the latter...

Consider what I wrote in a Note on Marc Simms's article 'Masturbating Ourselves to Death': "**Cynicism is lazy.** The kind of lazy that doesn't require you to think because you've already made up your misanthropic mind. I can respect skepticism—there's at least a curiosity and willingness to measure claims—but cynicism shows people how high an opinion you have of yourself in the utterance. Of course, a cynic would never agree to being a narcissist—that, too, they'd spit at ... and yet, if honest enough, one would accept that narcissism is that which drives the mood. *I know better. Life sucks. There's always something that will go wrong. That's not right. Yeah, but.* All these put you at the centre of the knowing. Even those who hurt and are (almost) justified in their moods about the world—even they fall into this trap. *Why me? Why does everybody take me the wrong way? Why are they looking at me like that? What should I say? Me, me, me—it's the epitome of narcissism. One does not need to think highly of oneself to be a narcissist (I've counselled many a narcissist who has terrible self-esteem) but only think disproportionately ... of themselves. But stop yourself, if you will, and you'll begin the road towards humility..."*

I've also written about cynicism in my Note on Jack Carr's *Only The Dead*, beginning with the topic of protest. I believe it's relevant here: "Protest is easy. Some might even say lazy, cynical, performative. 'Virtue signaling'? Perhaps. One cannot make a complete claim since what rests in each man's heart is his own ... but we've had enough protests over the years to see how many of those who step out onto the concrete and hold up signs know less about what they're protesting than those who stand in stark contrast. Doing something about it (the thing you feel strongly) about requires work ... and guts. And for those allergic to both, well, protest off a convenient way of flagging your righteousness. And yes, I am not naive to the fact of my own cynicism here. Yet, I don't think it's cynicism, truly—I'm skeptical to intentions. I've been to protests before, I see the appeal. But without the 'work' that lies beneath a simple act of disagreement, where will one turn? Protest itself, after all, is not the 'work' but merely the most convenient face of it..."

Think, too, of what Rob Henderson says in his 6 June 2025 Newsletter: "Consuming content from bitter people will subtly shape your own mindset and worldview, even if what they say is factually correct (though often it is not, because bitterness clouds people's ability to accurately interpret reality)"

## Chapter 8: A Bold Experiment

**"We should judge our founders by the standards of their time, not ours,** and extend to them the understanding that we would seek for ourselves in wrestling with our own issues. The world they lived in was quite different from our own."

"Australian sentiment has always been to trust their governments. They were creations of the burgeoning democratic era and were never regarded as either hostile to the public or the embodiment of ancient privileges. Australians expected their institutions to be helpful in their daily lives and to focus on the business of nation building. They were prepared to equip them with the means to do so, as their collective common sense thought best."

Not so any longer... My own experience before COVID was that government was generally trustworthy, had our best interests in mind. People chose one party and taught their kids to vote as such. Then enter government overreach ... mistrust ensues. Reminds me of what Jack Carr said in his novel *Only The Dead*:

"Do you know what Truman said about censorship?" Linden asked. "Spare me, Congressman; this isn't about censorship, it's about misinformation." "Ah yes, misinformation. Well, for posterity's sake, he said, 'Once a government is committed to the principle of silencing the voice of opposition, it has only one way to go, and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear.'"

Here are my thoughts that appear first on my *Notes* on the former: "Today, more and more, we frame opposition (or even questioning the prevailing narrative) as *misinformation*. Why? The most obvious answer is for one to 'get in line'. To question is to threaten. We value less the Enlightenment ideals and, though we shirk Christianity as the dominant institution, perhaps we're uplifting government as the answer to our problems ... or our *preferred* government."

Idealism and a mind made up and virtue signaled is called more than Truth. And where there is no clear foundation for Truth, perspective ("my truth") dominates. When every research finding can be countered with an opposite 'finding', how can one trust? I must admit, it is getting much harder to trust sources... Therefore, I go back to 'first-principles thinking' ... and faith. I put my trust in One higher, and try as I can to humble myself in doing such."

"[In the early 1900s, the] Aboriginal Protection Acts in the various states gave officials a large measure of control over Aboriginal peoples lives, including the removal of children from their mothers if it was thought to be in the child's best interests - often because the child was of mixed race."

**Early 1900s:** "The new Liberal Party won support from businesses, pastoralists, bankers, merchants and the urban middle class: clerks, shopkeepers, teachers, civil servants and women, recently enfranchised. Unlike Labor, which tended to appeal in male-dominated occupations, Liberals more often emphasised the concerns of households, reflecting their support from homemakers and middle-class professional women. The two-party system of Australian democracy was taking shape."

"[Former Australian prime minister Joseph] Cook succinctly summarised the new Liberal Party's ethos of pragmatism based on values: Liberalism is more than a theory of government, or even a program, no matter how admirable its planks may be. It is a state of mind, an attitude, an outlook which is as wide and comprehensive as the needs of the community. It determines its principles of action not with reference to the program of a party, but with regard to the actual facts of life."

## Chapter 9: The Great War

"For Australia, the Great War was a dreadful watershed, announcing our arrival to the wider world but at stupendous cost. **From a population of under five million, over 400,000 volunteered to fight;** 330,000 went overseas; 155,000 were wounded and 60,000 never came home. At Gallipoli, Australia sustained a glorious defeat, but on the Western Front was instrumental in a terrible victory. As the official historian, Charles Bean, said of the men of the First Australian Imperial Force: their example 'rises, as it always will rise, above the mists of time, a monument to great-hearted men; and for their nation, a possession forever'! The battles on the home front were hardly less significant. Alone of the major combatants, Australia put the question of conscription to a popular vote. The issue split the Labor Party and left it markedly less enthusiastic for alliances and for the armed forces - something that arguably echoes to this day."

"By this time the Australians had a new nickname - diggers' - a term originating in the gold rush but which took on a more resonant association with trench digging; at Gallipoli, General Sir Ian Hamilton's instructions at the end of the first day were to dig, dig, dig until you are safe!"

## Chapter 10: A Funereal Decade

"The 1920s were a difficult decade, not so much roaring as stuttering. While proud of their wartime record, Australians were haunted by its human and financial cost. Habituated by war to take an even bigger role in economic and social life, governments over-borrowed to fund ambitious schemes that often failed. In some ways, it was an economic re-run of the 1890s, only with a much worse national mood. Still, while countless families wrestled with unimaginable grief, advancements in science and technology started to make people's daily lives considerably easier, with cars and radios becoming common and domestic appliances like fridges and washing machines starting to make an appearance."

"If success appeared to follow [WWI veteran Captain Stanley] Bruce wherever he went, tragedy stalked closely behind. In 1899, his brother William suicided, and two years later, his father took his own life on an overseas business trip. His sister and mother both died before the outbreak of war and, in 1919, another brother Ernest, debilitated from his experiences on the Western Front, shot himself. Depression and death lingered over the Bruce family, as it did for many of the returning soldiers. Although opponents would caricature his wealth, his expensive tastes and his aloofness, his most obvious characteristic was his limp and the slow and painful dragging of his foot. Bruce exemplified Australia in the 1920s: a scarred nation hoping to return to some sense of normalcy and dignity."

"The returning soldiers had to adjust 'with no more protection than the naked framework of their character', said Charles Bean. **An estimated 10 per cent suffered from shell shock. Night terrors, speechlessness, depression and anxiety were widespread. Many turned to drink, which was the driver for the continuation of the wartime measure of six o'clock closing that was supposed to counter drunkenness.** Stanley Bruce, after being appointed as Australia's first representative to the newly established League of Nations, asked the Assembly 'to think for a moment of what it means to be a soldier': If you had seen men mutilated and dying without the possibility of being helped, if you had ever heard the cry of a wounded man out between the lines with no possibility of assistance being given him, and with a likelihood that he may lie dying there for days, if you had seen men gasping their lives out, their faces discoloured because of some hideous and frightful gas, then, I venture to say that you would look on this question with a different eye."

"By 1924, 237,000 Australians were on the war pension, including disabled veterans, dependants, widows and mothers. These benefits, together with

health, education and home subsidies, designed to assist the families of both fallen and returning soldiers, amounted to a '**second welfare state**' that sat alongside civilian welfare provision."

"**The war had left deep scars.** Population growth between 1914 and 1918 was half the pre-war rate. Per capita income declined by 16 percent. Even by 1922, half of Commonwealth expenditure was war-related and included interest on loans, pensions and repatriation costs. To return to normalcy - as conservative a promise as could be made - required change. Hence Bruce's policy of '**Men, Money, Markets**': designed to populate the nation with immigrants, to increase foreign investment to fund development projects and to build up Australia's manufacturing base."

"**To put the trauma of war behind them, Australians' inclination was to make the most of new opportunities.** Over the decade to 1929, the number of private motor cars quadrupled to 474,000. In 1924, the first radio station 2FC began broadcasting the news and, by 1925, Melbourne and Sydney had their own stations with hundreds of thousands of licensed listeners. Record crowds flowed into sporting events. In 1926, more than 118,000 attended the Melbourne Cup, a number that would not be surpassed until the year 2000. For the first time, annual cricker attendance surpassed a million in 1924-25, and set a record of 1.4 million four years later. In 1928, a 20-year-old Don Bradman made his cricket Test debut, and in 1930 he set the world record, still unbeaten, for most runs made in a Test series: 974."

"**The last documented massacre of Aboriginal people occurred remarkably late, in August 1928,** at Coniston Station, Northern Territory. A punitive raiding party led by police, initially responding to the death of a white dingo-trapper, killed dozens of Aboriginal people over the course of several weeks. Public outcry led to a board of inquiry, which controversially exonerated the responsible constable on the grounds of self-defence. The failure to prosecute indicated there was still much work to be done in applying the rule of law to all Australians on a fair and equal basis."

"At a 1925 conference, [Aboriginal leader Fred] Maynard articulated the purpose of the APA: 'As it is a proud boast of Australia that **every person born beneath the Southern Cross is born free, irrespective of origin, race, colour, creed, religion or other impediment** we, the representatives of the original people, in conference assembled, demand that we shall be accorded the same full right and privileges of citizenship as are enjoyed by all other sections of the community.'"

## **Chapter 11: The Economic Crisis**

"**The Great Depression was an economic earthquake for most who lived through it.** After a world war and a decade of political restiveness, radical voices grew louder. The Labor Party split again; the Nationalists fell apart

before reconstructing themselves; and New South Wales experienced its worst civic crisis since the Rum Rebellion, culminating in the dismissal of a Labor premier. All of this occurred against the backdrop of economic collapse: per capita GDP fell by 20 percent; trade union unemployment reached almost 30 per cent; and there were more bankruptcy proceedings in 1929 to 1930 than in the previous six years combined. In the midst of this crisis, one man, Joe Lyons, rallied the country to accept short-term pain all-round. **Australia's economically orthodox response to the Depression meant that its recovery was quicker than that of the United States**, despite the latter's much-vaunted New Deal."

**"In Europe, the crisis was throwing up dictators.** In 1930, the German Nazi Party secured 18 per cent of the vote and 107 seats in the Reichstag. Mussolini's slightly milder version of authoritarianism in Italy found adherents here. At a conference of the Young Nationalists in 1933, the Victorian attorney-general, Robert Menzies, then 39, watched Wilfrid Kent Hughes advocate a corporate state, where political power lies more in the hands of key organisations and institutions than in those of individual voters. To his credit, Menzies contradicted his friend, declaring that **'[f]ascism is inconsistent with parliamentary government'** and that **while '[w]e may not produce 100 per cent efficiency under our parliamentary system ... we do produce a very high percentage of liberty, and as a British people we are not inclined to exchange that freedom for some form of dictatorial control'.**"

## Chapter 12: Australia Threatened

**"Although in 1939 Australia was lamentably unprepared for war, the country fully mobilised** under prime ministers Menzies and then Curtin. Almost a million men and women wore uniform in the Second World War, and some 550,000 of them - one in 12 Australians - served overseas. To meet the demands of the 'home front', there was a 31 percent increase in women in the paid workforce. Some 40,000 Australians lost their lives - fewer than in the Great War - but our sovereignty was directly threatened for the first and, so far, only time. **An unlikely source testifies to the extent of our fighting spirit: 'if the invasion [of Australia] is attempted,' a Japanese Imperial General Staff document said in March 1942, 'the Australians, in view of their national character, would resist to the end.'** Working in lockstep with the British Army, the troops of the Second AIF spearheaded the initial action in sweeping the Italians out of Libya and liberating Syria from the Vichy French, and the 9th Division helped secure the British victory at El Alamein, but once Japan had entered the war, our focus was keeping the nearer enemy at bay. While the army 'mopped up' Japanese resistance in the islands to our north, over 3000 Australians participated in D-Day, mostly in Royal Navy and Royal Air Force units, and Australian ships and planes continued to play their part in the global Allied war effort."

"On 3 September 1939, the new prime minister [Robert Menzies] intoned that it

was his 'melancholy duty' to report 'that, in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her, and that, as a result, Australia is also at war'S As he later put it, great things were at stake: I do not believe that you can compromise about the vital things in civilisation, about peace and justice and freedom and the sane settlement of disputes. Either you have them or you do not have them. And there are no people more interested in securing them than the people of small and weak nations, and the small and weak people of every nation. Our cause is that there shall be justice and a quiet living for the weak as well as for the strong. It is a great and humane cause. It has been the dynamic force in our domestic political growth for centuries; from now on it must animate our international affairs and give direction to the policies of nations."

"Along with the rest of the English-speaking world, Australia could hardly bear to contemplate another world war, even though Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan had long been preparing for one. The Axis powers rejected the global order that had emerged after Versailles. They celebrated the military state and their right to expand and subordinate "inferior' races. As late as 11 September 1939, just days after he'd announced Australia's entry into the war, Menzies could still write 'that Hitler has no desire for a first-class war'. That was probably true, but a first-class war was the logical consequence of Hitler's intentions. A similar story had been unfolding in the Pacific. In 1934, after returning from a goodwill mission in Japan, the former Nationalist leader John Latham had warily accepted the assurances of the Japanese government that their ambitions were limited to Manchuria and China. But, by 1937, Japan was identifying areas to its south as indispensable for industrial development and defence, as Australia scrambled for guarantees from Britain that its imperial defence strategy would provide a protective buffer."

## Chapter 13: The Liberal Revival

**"By the war's end, we'd built up our strength as a nation and were eager to make the most of the opportunities of peace.** For a time, the [Labor] Chifley government seemed successfully to be building a land fit for heroes to live in. Eventually, despite the spirit of shared sacrifice that the war had engendered, people started to tire of ongoing rationing and restrictions. As well, even inside the Labor Party, concern was growing about the communist influence in the union movement. Bank nationalisation gave a revitalised Menzies, **leading a rebuilt Liberal Party, the political opportunity he was seeking to liberate Australia from the mindset of wartime control.**"

**Robert Menzies:** "I do not believe that the real life of this nation is to be found either in great luxury hotels and petty gossip of so-called fashionable suburbs, or in the officialdom of the organised masses. It is to be found in the homes of people who are nameless and unadvertised, and who, whatever their individual religious conviction or dogma, see in their children their greatest contribution to the immortality of their race."

## Chapter 14: The Age of Menzies

"Far from being a time of stagnation, the Menzies era was one of vast change. By its close, our principal military partner was the United States of America, our principal trading partner was Japan and the White Australia policy was all but dead. The Commonwealth's role grew, universities expanded and Aboriginal people began to enter the mainstream of Australian life by securing for themselves greater political rights. In 1954, the first ever royal tour by a reigning monarch was a spectacle that arrested the nation for weeks. By the late 1960s, royal visits had become almost routine events. Although much had changed, Menzies made it seem like nothing that really mattered had. That was his unique political skill. For all the economic, political and social transformations of the two post-war decades, Australia remained a tranquil and prosperous society where more people than ever had a 'fair go' and, in turn, were encouraged to 'have a go'. By and large, Australians had never had it so good."

"Post-war migration is one of Australia's great success stories. Almost two million migrants arrived between 1945 and 1965. Hundreds of thousands came from non-English-speaking countries. Even though this transformed Australia, it's now hard to imagine an Australia without them. It revealed that the vast majority of migrants came here not to change us, but to join us. Regardless of background, nearly all of them embraced what's been the Australian project since convict times: to enable people to better themselves and to leave their children with a better future than they had. As it's turned out, **ours is a civic rather than an ethnic patriotism built on what are at least potentially universal values: personal freedom, the rule of law, democracy and a sense of the fair go.**"

"By the 1950s, most Australians believed in the fundamental equality of every person. A Gallup poll in 1954 found 90 per cent agreeing with the proposition that if 'an aborigine had the same kind of upbringing as you ... he could have learnt to do your work!'"

"The most contentious aspect of Aboriginal welfare had long been the practice of child removal. Under Hasluck's reforms, **'partly coloured' children could only be taken if the child was neglected and the mother willingly consented.**! Still, 'neglect' could be a highly subjective concept between two very different cultures. **In some cases, the child's life might be in danger. In other cases, a traditional way of living, with little of the material comforts associated with Western life, might be mistaken for neglect.** Not every official understood this; Warren Mundine - who chaired my Indigenous advisory council when I was PM - can remember his grandfather chasing a welfare officer away with a gun. Even in official reports at the time, 'distressing scenes' of removals were widely reported. In the Northern Territory, Hasluck wanted such decisions taken on purely welfare grounds, regardless of the child's

ethnicity, and by the mid-1950s child removals in the Territory had notably declined."

## Chapter 15: Talkers and Doers

"Rising levels of immigration and education are among the most powerful drivers of social change. For all the seeming stability of the Menzies era, the rapid increase in tertiary education and unprecedented levels of non-British migration were transforming Australian society. We were more white collar and less blue collar; more diverse and less traditional. A more 'progressive' Labor Party under Gough Whitlam better suited this new Australia than a Liberal government that was running out of puff after 23 years in office. Whitlam highlighted and revelled in the changes that Menzies had downplayed and often regretted: like multiculturalism replacing assimilation for migrants, self-determination replacing integration for Aboriginal people, and globalism replacing reliance on 'great and powerful friends'. Whether Whitlam was a breath of much-needed fresh air or a deplorable aberration was a matter of perspective, but the progressive messian ultimately fell victim to hubris and an electorate that thought his reach had well and truly exceeded his grasp."

"As **Lenin** is reputed to have said, **nothing happens for decades and then decades happen in weeks. The Vietnam War radicalised a large portion of young Australians**, students especially, and became a defining generational moment."

"The Vietnam conflict helped to cement the Australia-US alliance, as the Australian government wanted it to. In the early 1960s, the circumstances under which Australia could rely on US support remained unclear. Holt wanted the USA in the region as a stabilising force and as a signal to Australia's neighbours that we did not stand alone. When Holt told Lyndon B. Johnson, the first serving US president to visit Australia, that he was "All the way with LBJ", it carried greater political weight than Curtin's look to America' plea because it was a conscious policy decision rather than a cry from a nation in distress."

"Television began to expose Australians to new and sometimes challenging ideas. **Sexual norms loosened after the contraceptive pill came onto the market in 1960**. By 1964, almost a third of married women were practising some form of birth control. A 'liberated' era demanded access to abortion, then illegal. In 1969, in Rv. Davidson, the Victorian Supreme Court ruled that abortion was not actually unlawful if the health and safety of the mother-to-be required it."

"On 18 August 1971, McMahon announced that the Australian task force in South Vietnam would be withdrawn by the end of the year, after almost a decade of combat in which Australian numbers peaked at about 8000 in early 1968. At the Battle of Long Tan, in August 1966, a company of Australians had fought off a much larger North Vietnamese force, establishing military

dominance in Phuoc Tuy province. Normally, the Australians' battle tactics relied much less on firepower than the Americans'. **A Viet Cong source later said that 'the Australians were more patient than the Americans, better guerilla fighters, better at ambushes. They liked to stay with us instead of calling in the planes. We were more afraid of their style'**. Still, while always capable of defeating their opponents in battle, America and its allies lacked the staying power to win over the population. By December 1972, fewer than 130 of the training team remained. **Over 50,000 Australian personnel had served, with 519 killed and 2400 wounded."**

## Chapter 16: Opening the Doors

"In important respects, the Australia of the late 1980s resembled the Australia of a century earlier, prior to the dashed hopes and rising fears of the anxious 1890s. Key elements of what Paul Kelly has called the post-federation Australian Settlement had been ditched: **White Australia had started to go after the war; imperial benevolence had become a thing of the past by the 1960s; industry protection had begun to erode under Whitlam and was further dismantled under Bob Hawke, our greatest Labor prime minister; state paternalism didn't quite vanish, but under Hawke and Keating the state was as solicitous of success as of failure; even wage arbitration morphed into enterprise bargaining.** The national mood was buoyant, too, fuelled by a resources boom that amounted to a second gold rush. Briefly, the political divide also resembled those 19th-century days, pitting Hawke's bigger government liberals' against Howard's smaller government Liberals."

## Chapter 17: Consolation

"Whatever one thinks of their politics, Hawke and Howard were two of our very best prime ministers, and together they gave Australia close to a quarter-century of economic reform plus social harmony. There was one important difference, though, in their respective circumstances. Hawke's reforms were carried largely with Opposition support; Howard's in the teeth of a fierce antagonism. **The Australia of 2000 was comfortable with its past and confident about its future. Over the course of two centuries, a convict colony had become one of the world's great democracies and arguably the world's most successful immigrant society."**

"In the wake of *Mabo*, **Keating** used an address at Redfern Park, on 10 December 1992, to offer a caustic opinion of British colonisation: **'We took the lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases and the alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice.'** It was *an eloquent but one-sided denunciation of Australia*, and came strangely from a national leader. Expunged from this story were the evangelical humanitarians and Whig liberals and the success of Indigenous Australians themselves in achieving legal and political equality over

the previous half-century. Such examples, which hint at a more complex story, held no place in Keating's imagination."

"Six weeks after the 1996 federal election, on 28 April, a lone gunman armed with an Armalite semi-automatic rifle, opened fire on men, women and children at the historic site of Port Arthur, Tasmania, killing 35 and wounding 23. It was the worst mass shooting since federation.

In Australia, unlike in America, there is no entrenched gun culture; in part, because of our relatively peaceful settlement and easy transition from colony to democracy. Although gun regulation was a state issue, the scale of the Port Arthur tragedy prompted a national response. Howard understood the importance of leadership to drive policy change under such dire circumstances. It helped that he was more pragmatist than dogmatist on states' rights. Working with state and territory ministers, the result was a National Firearms Agreement, settled just 12 days after the massacre, that banned the ownership of automatic and semi-automatic weapons, established a gun buy-back scheme, created a firearm registry and tightened restrictions on gun licences. It was a tough sell for country voters but senior ministers didn't shirk it. The National Party leader and deputy prime minister, Tim Fischer, bore the brunt of the backlash. Protestors burned his effigy, hanging by a noose on a tree, during one meeting. At a gun rally in Sale, Victoria, Howard even wore a bulletproof vest. These early demonstrations of courage from both leaders were instrumental in securing community acceptance. There have been no comparable gun incidents since."

## **Chapter 18: Drifting Backwards**

"By comparison with the Hawke-Howard years, the subsequent decade and a half has been a time of some frustration and disappointment. As this book is being finalised, in Australia, scarcely less than elsewhere in the Anglosphere, there's a sense of economic and strategic risk compounded by cultural confusion. To the extent that we're drifting as a nation, our leaders have let us down. In launching Paul Kelly's book *Triumph and Demise* back in 2014, I said that it was the historic mission of the Abbott government to show that the era of reform had merely been interrupted, not ended; and that the revolving-door prime ministership was an aberration, not the new normal. As it happened, that was not to be the case. Still, for nations, like people, better times are usually only a few good decisions and the emergence of a couple of key leaders away. If, as this book tries to show, we have a history to be proud of, that's because good people have made it so. Perhaps this account will encourage more of them to join our public life, to shape our future and to make our history."

"As a consequence of 262 days of pandemic lockdown in 2020 and 2021, 'rings of steel' around the city, restrictions on congregating in parks, many businesses and most schools largely closed and peacetime curfews, Melbourne became the most repressed city in the world outside of China. For the first time in two centuries, Australia was once more a prison island, with almost no one

allowed to leave. For the first time in a century, we were more a collection of states than a united nation: Western Australia was shut off from the rest of the country for much of two years; and people were dying in New South Wales because, in the then Queensland premier's words, 'In Queensland, we have Queensland hospitals for our people Old people died unvisited by loved ones in hospitals and nursing homes because the top priority was keeping such places Covid-free. Overseas observers marvelled at the passivity of a country they'd supposed was populated by rugged individualists. Eighteen months in, when freedom protests began, they were fiercely repressed. On one occasion, Victoria Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at protestors around the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne."

"In mid-2025, Australia remains relatively prosperous and untroubled. Yet as much as ever before in our history, there is a nagging sense that the country has been marking time or even drifting backwards, influenced by the politics of climate and identity. In common with much of the Anglosphere, we're materially rich but spiritually poor. The explosion of mental ill-health is one symptom of people's widespread loss of a sense of life's deeper meaning and purpose. It's worth noting that Australians telling the census that they adhered to a religious faith has dropped from over 90 per cent in the 1960s to just over 50 per cent in 2021. [...] Religious faith, it should be said, is not the only source of meaning and purpose but it's long been our main one."

"in order to atone for past injustices, we're giving special consideration to people on the basis of race and gender. Instead of being regarded as the genesis of modern Australia, the British settlement of Australia from 1788 now has the taint of illegitimacy due to the disruption of Aboriginal society. For at Least a generation, the tenor of education has been that modern Australia is the result of invasion, environmental despoliation and disrespect for minorities, even though that's only a very small part of the overall Australian story."

**Final reflections:** a readable political commentary on the history of Australia. If names and dates aren't your thing, give it a miss cos there are a lot here. But you can't really miss that if you're writing this kind of work. There are enough stories to keep you turning the pages, while also being many bland bits. This is the first book I've read of its kind and I must admit, it was okay. I knew little about the first fleets, native conflicts, and philosophy of the early Australians ... now I know a tiny bit more. It seems like the narrative we're given today regarding the taking over of Australia and putting to the sword its natives isn't quite right ... not that I was convinced about that narrative before I read this book anyway. Yes, atrocities happened. And yes they shouldn't have. But learning a little more

about the history has taught me those were more of a bug than a feature...

In saying this, Australia at its beginning seems to have been a 'project'. It was a place people tried to get right and made mistakes in its delivery (not too different to what you see today). Humans are humans and they will do what humans do. I'm glad to be living in this country and I pray it gets better ... for the sake of those who come after us.

*These notes were collected by psychotherapist and author Emil Barna in January 2026 in his efforts to assist with professional development and further education for himself and those who read them. But remember, they are but a glimpse of what the book is actually about—for more context, buy the book and make up your own mind. You can find out more about Emil by visiting [www.barnacc.com](http://www.barnacc.com)*

***"A text without a context is a pretext to a proof text."***  
**—Dr. Don Carson**