

THE

# Sydney Institute

## QUARTERLY

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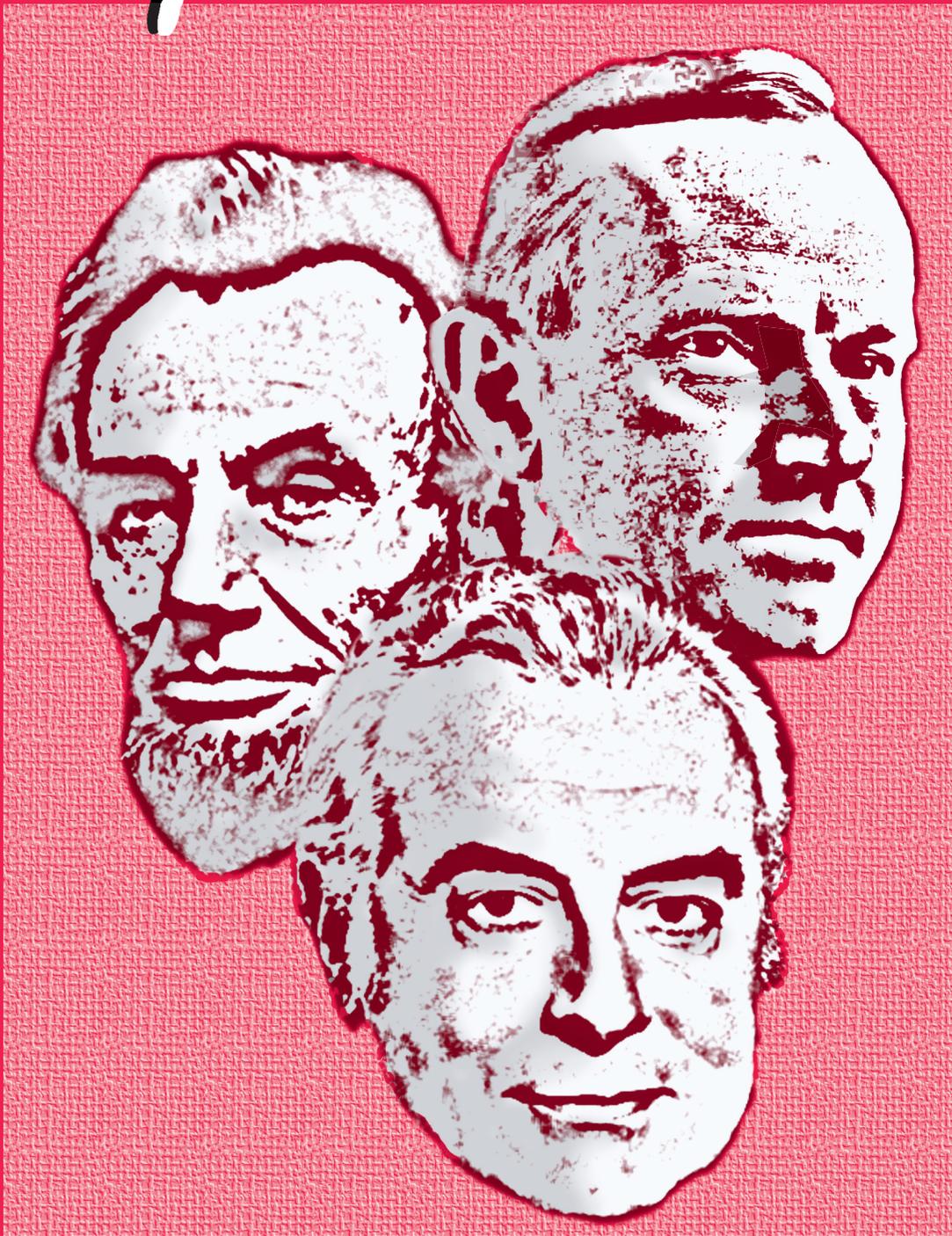
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**MEDIA WATCH'S**  
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*with Gerard Henderson's*

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## LINDA MOTTRAM & EMMA ALBERICI REFLECT ABC CONSENSUS

ABC managing director and editor-in-chief Mark Scott likes to present himself as a vibrant media manager with a business plan that works. This glosses over the reality that the ABC’s business plan involves travelling to Canberra with an empty case and having it loaded up with taxpayers’ funds by an obliging government.

Despite the current financial constraints, Mark Scott managed to receive an extra \$90 million for the ABC in this year’s budget. Some funds will be spent on a Fact Checking Unit, which will ignore errors in ABC programs but will focus on the alleged errors made by business, political parties and other organisations. Needless to say, the ABC chose the left-wing Russell Skelton – who has criticised conservatives in general and Tony Abbott in particular – as head of the new unit.

The culture of the ABC is such that it does not lead to an understanding of either criticism or the private sector media. A few examples illustrate the point. On 22 May 2013, following some criticism of the ABC by the Liberal Party, Sydney Metropolitan Radio 702 presenter Linda Mottram used the occasion of an interview with former ABC general manager David Hill to ask her guest about the ABC. Ms Mottram presented a “Dorothy Dixer” – namely “is it time to rethink whether public broadcasters should be put into private hands” and raised the issue of bias. Not surprisingly, Mr Hill defended the public broadcaster and dismissed all criticism of bias against the ABC by either the Coalition or Labor. It is a matter of fact that the Greens never criticise the ABC – since the ABC tends to criticise both the Coalition and Labor from the left.

On the ABC 702 *Drive* program on 6 June 2013, discussion turned on the media. ABC *Lateline* presenter Emma Alberici was one of the guests. She simply declared that, at the ABC, “we’re not concerned by the dollar”. Ms Alberici added that she “didn’t see a future where commercial newspapers and television are going to make any kind of money of significance online”. She pointed out that *The Guardian* (which loses around £30 million a year) and *The Conversation* (which is subsidised by the taxpayer) along with so many online sites (including the ABC) provide news for free. So, according to Emma Alberici, taxpayer funded news has a future and private sector funded news is dying or dead. The point here is that the *Lateline* presenter did not seem to believe that such a situation raised problems – and she criticised News Corporation executive James Murdoch for suggesting otherwise.

That’s the ABC’s world. The public broadcaster is a Conservative-Free-Zone which denies this reality and dismisses any criticism that it lacks balance and plurality. Also, ABC types believe it is proper that the media should be fully government funded. Little wonder that a survey conducted in early 2012 by academic Folker Hanusch found that, of ABC journalists who declared a voting intention, 41 per cent supported Labor, 32 per cent the Greens and a mere 15 per cent the Coalition. Enough said. The voting intentions of ABC journalists reflect the ABC’s culture which is sympathetic to government funding and regulation.

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# WHY THE 1920S “ROARED” – CALVIN COOLIDGE AND DEBT

Anne Henderson

Posted as Australia's first head of mission in Washington in 1940, Richard Casey communicated his early impressions to his prime minister, Robert Menzies, in a letter dated 14 March. In it, Casey gave updates on the usual formalities of establishing an embassy, but ended with an assessment of how he found the United States, generally.

At the time the USA, like Australia, was slowly emerging from an era of financial downturn and high unemployment, following the Wall Street crash in 1929, its immediate aftermath of credit squeeze and subsequent years of depression. Yet, what Casey found suggested that, in the US, money was not the problem – “This country,” he wrote to Menzies, “is so lush with unused idle money that it makes one cry.”

With the shock of national indebtedness in the first decades of the twenty-first century – from Europe to the USA – the American president the world forgot has come back into focus. US President Calvin Coolidge (August 1923-January 1929) was the president so obsessed with conquering America's record debt, following World War I, that by 1927 he had delivered for the United States its highest ever standard of living.

The surpluses Coolidge and his Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon, achieved were handed back as tax cuts. Over a few years, in spite of substantially lowering the rates of taxation, the increased economic activity that eventuated had, in turn, handed the US government a healthy budget.

Calvin Coolidge was the outsider from Vermont who accepted the Republican nomination for Vice-President in 1922. When President Warren Harding died suddenly during a trip to California, on 2 August 1923, “Silent Cal” – as he was nicknamed – became

America's most unassuming president, sworn in by his notary public father by kerosene lamplight in the small town of Plymouth Notch where he was visiting his family's farm.

This avoidance of self-promotion, coupled with his presidency years lacking the high drama of either war or financial disaster, until now has rendered the Calvin Coolidge presidency all but forgotten.

Moreover, mistakenly, detractors have held the Coolidge period of economic upturn as somehow responsible for the stock market crash of 1929, as if the 1920s in the US were nothing more than Great Gatsby-style excess. Nothing could be further from the truth.

New books on Coolidge, in the past year, have revived Coolidge's memory. *Why Coolidge Matters: Leadership Lessons from America's Most Underrated President* by Charles C Johnson and Amity Shlaes' *Coolidge* give the lie to Coolidge's detractors. In very timely reminders and non-equivocal terms, Shlaes and Johnson argue that today's Western world should turn its focus backwards and learn from Coolidge – it is not too late. Their case is a sound one.

As Amity Shlaes points out, the world of Coolidge used a different language when speaking of the economy. Certainly Coolidge did:

**He did not say “the federal government”; he said “the national government”. He did not say “the private sector”; he said “commerce”. He did not say “savings”; he said “thrift” or “economy”. Indeed he especially cherished the word “economy” because it came from the Greek for “household”, and to her displeasure he monitored the White House housekeeper with the same vigilance he monitored the departments of the federal government.**

With this mindset, and in a complete reversal of policymakers' thoughts today, Coolidge and his administration took the US from a post world war trough of debt to boom years after raising interest rates by 300 basis points, cutting tax rates and halving the costs and involvement of the federal government.

As Shlaes argues, this recipe for growth is one we can all revisit, and hope to find answers from. But the Coolidge philosophy was also strongly centred on a determined belief in the individual and, as Shlaes notes, from the 1930s on, “collectives and not individuals became fashionable”.

As Charles C Johnson sees it, President Obama's attempt to force “the rich” to pay a fairer share has seen US taxes rise despite the US economy's

contracting. For Johnson, this ignores an established fact revealed during Calvin Coolidge's terms as president – "taxes can't solve Washington's fiscal woes, because to tax is to destroy the dynamic sources of our prosperity".

## **SCIENTIFIC TAXATION**

What bookended the Coolidge period was a composite belief in "normalcy" – what today we might call good government – and the economic theories of Andrew Mellon who converted Coolidge to his "scientific taxation".

While Coolidge believed, when he met Mellon, that low rates of taxation were not only good because they "encouraged enterprise" he also held that lower tax rates brought less money to government and "starved the government beast". Government should not bear down on the backs of its citizens. Mellon agreed with Coolidge on the need for lesser government, but disagreed on the outcomes of lower taxation.

For Mellon, lowering taxes certainly opened up commerce and business investment – all of which gave employment to a nation's citizens and made advances in technology and opportunity. But lowering taxes did not have to mean less money for government.

Taking shipping and railroading as an example, Mellon brought Coolidge to an understanding of his theories of scientific taxation. A transport company should charge rates for freight according to what it could carry as a maximum. Charge too much and the system would be underused and income would fall; charge a little less to maximise use and income would increase for the same costs of running the operation.

A government which lowered taxes – both on salaries and business – gave a shot in the arm to enterprise. The increased economic activity (read "commerce") would, as a consequence, bring back to government improved revenue. To slay the government beast, as Coolidge believed it to be, there was no requirement to use increased revenue to add to government outlays; instead, the surplus should be used to lower the rates of taxation and further increase the spending and investment power of individuals.

Naturally, such theories and attempts to change the mindset took a few tries. In his first attempt to get a tax bill along the lines of the Mellon theories through the Congress, Coolidge was forced to accept one watered down to a point he felt was useless. But Calvin Coolidge was "Silent Cal". He brooded, and smoked on his fat cigars, and thought of Lincoln.

Perseverance was Coolidge's signature quality, as it had been Lincoln's. Government was a journey of

deals and persistence – especially between White House and Congress. Coolidge signed the much amended tax bill and resolved to run again, and prevail.

But even with a small twist of outlook, the economy or what Coolidge might call commerce, began to brighten. And government income rose – figures for income tax revenues for the financial year ended June 1924 showed an increase of around 9 per cent on the previous year.

In his next term, having won a record victory in the 1924 presidential election, Coolidge would make good his determination to get his tax reform bill through Congress. America prospered as a result, even as Coolidge warned a stock market correction was inevitable. As his successor Herbert Hoover's more expansionist government policies took effect, in projects such as the Hoover Dam, Coolidge's warning was found to be accurate.

But the fallout from the stock market crash of 1929 was not what, in the longer term, dug in such unrelenting unemployment figures for the US during the 1930s. In Australia, where debt had been the compass point for states and federal government spending in the 1920s, it was the austerity and balanced budgets of the Lyons period – as in the UK with Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain – that reduced unemployment levels far more quickly than in the US. Australia's unemployment had moved back to single digit figures by the mid 1930s.

During Franklin Roosevelt's terms of office and under his "New Deal" bid spend and increased government regulation, from 1932, the USA suffered double digit unemployment for most of the 1930s. Growth stagnated. Business held back – and that "unused idle money" that Richard Casey noted in early 1940 remained just that. Idle.

The Coolidge/Mellon mindset had retreated; and commerce dried up, surrounded by big government and an over regulated market. Meanwhile, the men with the money sat on it, waiting for another period that would make their investments worthwhile. A second World War soon saw to that.

## **THE OLD DEAL**

It was former President Teddy Roosevelt's daughter Alice Longworth who described the administration of Calvin Coolidge in comparison to Harding's as an atmosphere "as different as a New England parlour is from a back room speakeasy". In this, she captured how the character of Vermont and its dogged endurance from America's founding fathers' spirit had moulded America's thirtieth president.

As Amity Shlaes happily admits, Coolidge was a skinflint, but she adds, “holding government back is very hard”. And it took a number of skins shed to bring Coolidge to the “Old Dealer” he would be as president.

When he began his early political career, Coolidge had been something of a progressive. In 1909 as a Republican candidate, he had won narrowly (by 107 votes) to become Mayor of Northampton, a Democrat stronghold. But Coolidge got along well with his Irish constituents, the largest immigrant group in Massachusetts, and had worked to help many of them. “At least 400 Democrats voted for me,” he reported to his father after the vote.

Coolidge’s natural affinity for his Irish constituents fitted with Republican President Teddy Roosevelt’s “Square Deal” that sought to regulate the workforce and reform industry for the betterment of workers. Roosevelt retired as president at the 1908 elections, leaving the way for his colleague William Taft to succeed him.

But, in August 1910, fearing Taft was losing sight of the labour leaning and progressive program Roosevelt had initiated for Republicans, Roosevelt had returned to the political scene and a split among the Republicans threatened Coolidge’s hopes as mayor. Coolidge himself hung on, but Democrats won a majority in Northampton that year. It was undoubtedly Coolidge’s personal involvement with voters that helped him retain his position.

Shlaes writes of Coolidge’s career “bumping” upwards. His was no meteoric rise - underrated and understated was Calvin Coolidge. But, this should not be confused with lack of ambition. Coolidge was the silent achiever, the man of pared down words but the man who hit the mark with ordinary people in his simple manner of communication and who made a mark when least expected. His showing as mayor in 1910 was just one instance in this – as the other Republicans fell by the wayside and Coolidge remained standing, his reputation “bumped” up again.

But it would be quite another battle that took him into the big league. This was Boston’s police strike of September 1919 by which time Calvin Coolidge was Governor of Massachusetts.

It was not that members of the Boston police did not have genuine grievances. Pay and conditions were poor. But the trigger was a dispute between the police and the police commissioner over their right to organise under a charter with the American Federation of Labor. Commissioner Curtis believed the police had no right to be unionised.

The dispute resulted in 19 police leaders being sacked by the commissioner. These 19 policemen were subsequently tried and found guilty of union activity. At this point, a vote to strike taken by the police saw more than 70 per cent of the force go out.

Boston was in a state of complete lawlessness as replacement police refused to work and volunteers took time to organise. The state guard were called out and Coolidge hardened his attitude towards the striking policemen. Hysteria built in the press that “Bolshevism” had hit the streets, with union ratbagery a theme.

Even President Wilson found his pet issues of peace and the League of Nations overshadowed by a discussion of the lack of industrial peace. Siding with the labour leader Samuel Gompers, the Democrat president urged a compromise as he made his trip out west to promote the League.

Businesses were also pushing Coolidge to find a middle way. Coolidge held firm. He pulled rank over Boston’s Mayor Peters, using a statute to support the commissioner’s right to call the shots. The commissioner then called out the entire state guard of Massachusetts.

Police Commissioner Curtis eventually prevailed, but it was Coolidge who won the laurels for returning Boston to order. The defeated and dismissed policemen were left to seek employment elsewhere as newcomers were taken on, while the state guard kept the peace.

From it all, Coolidge had turned conservative stating, “The action of the police in leaving their posts of duty is not a strike. It is a desertion.” Instead of being defeated at the forthcoming election, as he had been warned, Coolidge retained his governorship with 62 per cent of the vote.

By the time Coolidge had accepted the Republican nomination for vice president the following year, Teddy Roosevelt’s “Square Deal” had undergone much change – the cry from Harding and Coolidge was for America to “find its way back to the Old Deal”. Belief in experiments was out, and hope for a return to the “efficient administration of our proven system” was back in favour.

## **THE COUNTING HOUSE**

If you were inviting guests to liven up a party, Calvin Coolidge would not be on your invitee list. But if you were hoping your party would not put you out of pocket, you’d certainly ask Coolidge to draw up the budget. And while Scott Fitzgerald’s images of Gatsby suggest the 1920s were mostly years of

overblown excess, the scenes in Coolidge's office with his budget director Herbert Lord were quite the reverse. Shlaes gives a flavour from the outset of the Coolidge years, 1923:

**The meetings took place once a week. He scheduled them at 9.30am on Fridays, before the session with the full cabinet at eleven ... He and the budget director actually needed more minutes, not fewer, to prepare if they were going to fend off the cabinet. ... Together the new president and his budget director cut, and then cut again. The cutting differed only in scale from the cutting John Coolidge had labored over so long by kerosene lamp, trying to match outlays with meagre revenues from the school tax or the snow tax. ... Over the pair hung the awareness of the federal debt; the payments on the debt were manageable now, but scheduled to explode in coming years.**

Within days the word was out. Coolidge was pruning the government. All departments would have to find ways to reduce their budgets – a massive (for the time) cut of \$300 million on the previous year across departments. And it continued over the weeks to come. The Navy would lose 20 per cent of what it had asked for, the corrupt Veterans Bureau was told to cut round \$50 million, and the District of Columbia would be given no provision for new public works including new school sites and buildings.

In 1924, in a phone conversation with a group of Jewish philanthropists, Coolidge said that he believed in budgets and wanted others to believe in them. "The budget idea, I may admit, is a sort of obsession with me," he said.

Obsessed he was – in the interests of taxpayers. As the presidential campaign took off, debt was substantially down, interest rates had fallen from 7 per cent to 3.5 per cent and Victory Bonds, held by 12 million Americans, had moved up from below par to at par. Coolidge won.

But while the figures were good news, it was still only some of the way for Coolidge, as Shlaes describes:

**In the New Year, the first move Coolidge made – tiny but significant – was to change his calendar. Lord's permanent appointment was moved up to 9.15am instead of 9.30am. That gave Coolidge more time to cut the budget, a task that became harder each year that passed; they were near \$3 billion, but not there yet. Lord, creatively, would in the coming**

**weeks find three more cuts: the Weather Bureau would cease sending out postcards carrying forecasts ... the newspapers nowadays carried such material free. Post office bags could be made of plain gray canvass not the traditional white with blue stripes: savings, \$50,000 a year. The government favored a distinct red tape for wrapping federal documents. Henceforth it would dispense with red tape. Literally. The white string would do.**

With such fastidiousness, Coolidge and Lord worked away to find their \$3 billion target. As with the minutia of the itemised cuts, their extra 15 minutes once a week would help make a difference.

Having gained their precious tax reform legislation, Coolidge and Mellon handed back to taxpayers, in tax cuts, the handsome surpluses they had reaped. In his 1925 inaugural address, Coolidge had said, "I favour the policy of economy, not because I wish to save money, but because I wish to save people." And the manner of those cuts produced a fairer outcome, as Charles Johnson argues:

**By lowering taxes, Coolidge actually produced humanitarian results. ... Those making less than \$5000 a year paid 15.4 per cent of total income taxes in 1920, but only 0.4 per cent in 1929. Those who earned more than \$100,000 paid 65.2 per cent, up from 29.9 per cent over that same period. Coolidge got more revenue too.**

Calvin Coolidge took America back to its roots – a democracy founded on enterprise and ideals where activity stimulated growth. Taking his spirit and inner drive from the discipline and order of his Calvinistic roots, in both name and presence this understated leader produced change by doing rather than with any rhetorical flourishes. His pared down words contained the wisdom of the founding fathers, if not their poetry.

Above all, Coolidge restored America's pride and prosperity at a key moment in history – an achievement that today, nine decades on, eludes both sides of US politics. In this light, authors such as Amity Shlaes and Charles C Johnson have revived a ghost whose time is now.

Anne Henderson is the editor of *The Sydney Papers Online*



# A STUDY ON THE AMERICAN FIREARM

Anonymous

Every sense is on high alert, yet my entire periphery blurs as the hyper focus of my eyes and every sinew of my body focuses in on a single, faraway speck. Everything is steady, solid, rooted in the ground. Adrenaline streams over me, but instead of producing a jittery excitement, it entices me with invincibility. I slowly draw my finger in, and instantaneously, the distant clear, plastic bottle falls to the ground as the rifle booms.

I am a natural shot with a perfect, centred hole on my first try. I feel not only powerful, but also strangely sexy. My surroundings begin to register again, a dusty ranch in California with two little wild boys running around with sticks, and our parents reminiscing about their hippie days. I hand the gun over, with confident fingers that had earlier handled the weapon gingerly.

My father takes a shot at another bottle, misses, and I feel myself swell with pride topped with a healthy dose of superiority. I am suddenly better than my father, all because I can handle a gun better. In a return to our ancestral hunter past, I feel a jolt of independence: I am no longer beholden to my father - I can provide for and protect myself.

After the gun is put away, the hyper focused, solid, on-track-minded me begins to fade: I am suddenly petrified with how simple it would have been for the rifle to slip and the bullet to, instead of punching through the bottle, slide into one of the angelic wild boys' ribs. That bullet would not have differentiated between the tragic and the prideful outcome, between the flesh and the plastic. And yet it still feels cool, not embarrassing, to say I have fired a gun. I am proud of my killing machine, I am cool because of it. And all I was doing was shooting at flimsy bottles.

Firearms have been integral to the USA since the very beginning, symbols of our power and influence. The first settlers, even the first explorers, all had guns. (Although the Spanish often omitted them in ship records to escape taxes.)<sup>i</sup> Firearms were

integral in the settlers' protection and used to instill fear and wonder in the Indians, giving the settlers easy power over them.<sup>ii</sup>

Without the patriots' personal firearms, America would never have been able to fight the War of Independence. American history is gun history, for guns were crucial from the moment of the country's inception. The first handheld guns in the world were developed in China in the thirteenth century and needed two people to operate them, not exactly symbols of individuality.<sup>iii</sup> It is in America that firearms have taken on their unique status as symbols of independence.

## REMEMBERING COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL

Perhaps one of the most defining moments of guns in our history came when 18 year old Eric Harris and 17 year old Dylan Klebold shot down 12 students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado on the 20 April 1999. At the time of the shooting, I was only four so I do not remember the event, but it is a tragedy that is consistently brought up when another shooting happens (and they seem to be happening with more frequency every year.)

As weapons, the two boys used four different guns, along with various knives and small bombs during the attack: Dylan carried a TEC-DC9 and a 311-D shotgun and Eric used a 995 carbine rifle and 67H 12 shotgun.<sup>iv</sup> The nation was overcome with horror and outrage. It seemed unthinkable that two teenage boys could fire, almost indiscriminately, on their classmates, and even now, fourteen years later, their exact motives are not entirely clear.

Supposedly, Eric was a psychopath and Dylan was a depressive, but that isn't enough of a reason to orchestrate the worst mass school shooting in American history.<sup>v</sup> The shooters were not the social outcasts that the media made them out to be: they both had a bunch of friends, and Dylan had gone to prom the week before the shooting.<sup>vi</sup> Picking up a gun, however, made them feel powerful and what greater motive did they need than that?

It is commonly accepted that bad boys are more attractive than sweet, well-behaved ones. Danger is alluring and sexy and, in our culture, is sought after instead of reviled. With a society constantly sending these messages, we should be surprised that children don't pick up guns more often. It is considered weak to not want to pick up a gun. Until protests of the Vietnam War gained traction, any able bodied man who didn't want to rush off to war and kill America's "enemies" was an unpatriotic coward.

Children will act on what they see reflected in their society: if the adults act as though guns are acceptable and even more than that, representations of power, then children will not learn that there's any problem with guns.

### **TEC-DC9: A GUN TOO DANGEROUS**

The TEC-DC9 that Dylan primarily used in the Columbine shooting epitomises many of the problems with guns in America: it is far too dangerous a weapon for general use, yet it will not go away. It has a reputation as the gun of criminals because it has been used in so many mass murders, street fights, and other violent, murderous crimes.<sup>vi</sup> There is no reason for it to be legal: it has an enormously large magazine capacity, which means increased firepower, and it is impractical as a professional gun because of its size, weight, and inaccuracy.<sup>viii</sup>

It is also very cheap to produce, easily concealable, and has many military features.<sup>ix</sup> It is almost as though it was designed for the use of mass shooters. Finally, the TEC-DC9 has successfully eluded the law. It was outlawed in 1982 and 1994, but stayed in production because it changed its name and superficially shed a few qualities here and there like a snake shedding its skin.<sup>x</sup>

It has been marketed under at least five different names, the KG-9, KG-99, TEC-9, TEC-DC9, AB-10, with insubstantial differences between each. Dylan was able to get off 55 rounds on his firearm.<sup>xi</sup> To a logical human being, it would seem like a no brainer to make the TEC-DC9 (or whatever Intratec is calling it these days) completely illegal, but to many Americans, particularly those who belong to the National Rifle Association, or NRA, to do so would endanger their inalienable, basic, critical-to-survive Second Amendment Right.

The Second Amendment states, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."<sup>vii</sup> The Bill of Rights makes it almost impossible to curb gun rights, because to curb inalienable rights is to curb independence, a big taboo in America.

### **THE SECOND AMENDMENT RE-INTERPRETED**

Although the Amendment was actually popularly interpreted for over 200 years as only protecting a militia's right to arm itself against the federal government, in 2008 with the Supreme Court case *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the classic interpretation changed. The pro-gun movement, who wanted fewer stringent gun laws, spearheaded the

case, and Justice Antonin Scalia presented the amendment as one of the founding father's safeguards of independence, making guns into a way to insure one hangs on to freedom.<sup>xiii</sup>

Legally, even opponents of the decision, like President Barack Obama and Paul Hemkey, an anti-gun advocate, admit that this interpretation is constitutional.<sup>xiv</sup> The law supports an individual's right to have a gun. In this case the law, the true foundation of the United States, is not only wrong, but is actively supporting an evil in this country. Common sense is thrown away when it comes to guns in the United States. But the law is not the universal reason for the strength of gun activism in the United States. Guns are still just too cool, despite all the horrors that they are responsible for.

### **WHY GUNS SHOULD BE AN EMBARRASSING HABIT**

Cigarettes once had the sexy, dangerous allure of firearms. Cigarettes were mildly more crafty: it took a while (and a bit of science) to figure out how damaging they are, while guns' side effects are slightly more transparent. But even after the health risks of cigarettes were known, smoking was still rampantly popular. It took a drastic shift in the coolness factor to rein in smokers.

What was once a social phenomenon, mysterious and chic, has become an embarrassing habit. If you still smoke now, you are very silly; I remember as a child approaching people smoking on the street, coughing at them, and announcing, in no uncertain terms, that what they were doing was stupid. Smoking went from the height of cool to the depths of a child's judgment.

Guns need this shift. The pedestal they have been placed on must be laughed down. People in our society don't care about their safety, as much as their perceived and self image. For constitutional reasons, guns, like cigarettes, cannot be outlawed, but limits can be placed on them.

Joe Nocera referenced another deadly behavior in the *New York Times* when he paralleled drunk driving to gun ownership by saying, "I would like to see a cultural change, like the cultural change that took place with drunken driving, where a behavior that was once acceptable becomes unacceptable. I would like to see a cultural protocol, for instance, that would make it O.K. for parents to ask other parents if there is a loaded gun in the house prior to allowing a play date."

The allure of guns is really an engrained cultural problem. Like a car with a drunk driver, like cigarettes, guns are killing machines and need to be treated as such.

The coolness factor of guns is seen every day. A friend recently captioned a picture of me holding a fake gun, dressed up as Princess Leia on Facebook as “sex”. Films like *Charlie’s Angels* are responsible for a similar message, while everything from video games to the latest Tom Cruise film make guns seem like thrilling keys to power.

## THE AUSTRALIAN ALTERNATIVE

Australia is a similar society to the United States in many ways: it listens to the same music, speaks English, has Western values, dresses pretty much the same (there’s slightly more skin on display down there), has a similar governmental system, and was originally a British colony. Yet by Australian society guns are perceived as not only dangerous, but stupid and uncool.

Since 1996 when, during John Howard’s Prime Ministership, stringent gun control laws were enacted, there have been zero mass shootings.<sup>xv</sup> My relatives in Australia cannot fathom why America does not adopt stricter gun control methods. Without the superficial values like independence that Americans attach to guns, their legal stature is ridiculous.

Besides the impractical visual of rounding up all of the guns in the country, like books in *Fahrenheit 451*, there are valid reasons to own a firearm that have nothing to do with someone’s self image. I would often visit Colorado as a child and my family and I would stay at 9,000 feet in the middle of miles of wilderness. When you’re walking around in a place where you are likely to see a half-eaten carcass up a tree, it would be unsafe not to have a gun, even if the most action I’ve seen out of my father’s 44 magnum is warning shots fired during hikes to scare bears and mountain lions away.

## GUNS AS PART OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

As much as I abhor guns, I can still value their presence, very selfishly, when they’re being used to protect me, or those I love. The problem, of course, is best epitomised in my problematic brother, who on trips to the multipurpose store in Colorado, would whine and whelp for a new shiny toy gun, with an orange cap to mark it apart from its dangerous relatives. The message infiltrating my childish brother’s impressionable brain when he saw my father with his gun on hikes was not one of necessary protection, but rather that guns were grownup and cool. In this country, firearm’s positive message starts early.

Legally, it is almost impossible to manage this mucky line between necessary control of guns and crimes committed by guns. Consider that where my family

needs the gun for protection against bears and mountain lions is less than 190 miles from where the Columbine shooting took place.<sup>xvi</sup> It is not as black and white an issue as many moralists would like us to believe.

According to Dan Baum, “Americans feel ‘over-managed and under-respected,’” in regard to guns.<sup>xvii</sup> As a population, we view gun control as juvenile and demeaning: of course no legislation can get past. Keeping guns has become a matter of pride in maintaining our power and a matter of patriotism in upholding our independence. According to a poll taken by Fox News, it is more important to protect the constitutional right of citizens to own guns than to protect citizens from gun violence.<sup>xviii</sup>

Speculatively, is our society responsible for all these deaths in all these shootings because we make it so easy to access guns and people don’t have the self-control to resist them? That is a pretty dour outlook on who we are as a human race, but if you apply it to America where we have had sixty-two mass shootings in the last thirty years, it makes all of us complicit in murder.<sup>xix</sup>

Not only is access to guns wide open, but we have also made owning a gun a part of the American dream, a final fulfillment of individuality and independence. Anyone who opposes individuals’ right to a gun is unpatriotic. It is selfish to defend guns just because owning one makes you feel cool, powerful, and independent. But perhaps that is all guns and the TEC-DC9 say about America: we are selfish.

*The author is a student studying at an American university.*

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# POLITICAL POWER & THE WHITE HOUSE - THE WEST WING, BOSS, LINCOLN, HOUSE OF CARDS

Stephen Matchett

## FADE IN: THE OVAL OFFICE

**Abraham Lincoln** behind desk working on documents.

**Chief of Staff Leo McGarry**, deputy chief **Josh Lyman** and press secretary **C.J Cregg** enter. **Lincoln** looks up, anxious.

**THE PRESIDENT** - Good news from **Wilmington?**

**LEO** - No, Mr President, the Secretary of the Navy says the rebels are still firing

**JOSH** - Which is a problem for the special election in the Wisconsin fourth

**CJ** - And I need something for the briefing room; they're on deadline for the telegraph

**THE PRESIDENT** - Well lie, damit – but not too much, politics must not besmirch the nobility of our cause, which reminds me of a story ...

**THE OTHERS** - Thank you Mr President

Yes the drama is different but this is presidential politics Aaron Sorkin style, an approach that was the orthodoxy for damn near 20 years, from the movie *The American President* to the TV series, *The West Wing*. In the process it shaped the great political drama of our age – Stephen Spielberg's *Lincoln*.

This is not a film about the Civil War, or the end of slavery. It is a film about a bloke who gradually worked out what he had to do and then determined at whatever price, to do it. The sort of man Aaron Sorkin sold as the beau ideal of public life.

Not that everybody got this. Sure *Lincoln* is a hit, earning \$275 million to June.<sup>1</sup> But some critics thought Daniel Day Lewis laid the heroism and self-sacrifice on with a trowel, indulging in “boilerplate pathos.”<sup>2</sup> Others resented any idea that Lincoln freed the slaves, arguing rightly but irrelevantly, that the generality of slaves freed themselves, defying their owners as Confederate power waned, and that abolitionism predated the president.<sup>3</sup>

The critics miss the point. The film is really about how American politics works and how the founding fathers’ ideal of politics as a profession for patriots not power mongers is what binds the nation’s government.

Spielberg and scriptwriter Tony Kushner’s point was reinforced just months after their movie *House of Cards*. The success of this series, about a monstrously corrupt Democrat House majority leader with an Urquhart obsession (readers under 40 ask your parents), seemed to signal the end of the modern era of idealism in US political dramas. An era of optimism which began 20 years ago with *The American President* and culminated last year in *Lincoln*.

## HEROES OR BASTARDS?

But it does no such thing. Certainly, *House of Cards* is set in the world of real politics, the one Lincoln lived in and the one which shaped *The West Wing*, certainly after 2001, when Jed Bartlet morphed from a more polished and less priapic Bill Clinton into a Lincoln-like figure, focused on saving the nation.

*House of Cards*’ core theme is that politics is a business for bastards ultimately destroying all with the ability to succeed in it – which is a thoroughly good thing too, what with their being bastards.

But *House of Cards*, and its peer *Boss* (about a fictional Chicago mayor) do not demonstrate the way Americans expect all their politicians to behave. In fact they are morality tales about the way politics devours its devotees.

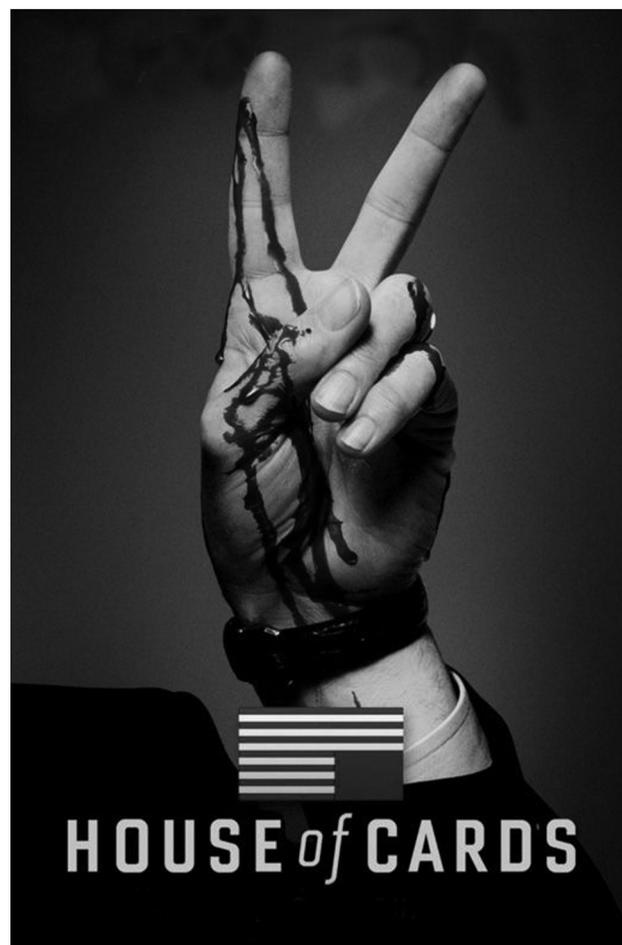
For all their cynicism, these two shows are in step with close to two decades of dramas that present American politics as depending on the automatic stabilisers that keep the republic steady on the boundless sea of politics. The ambitions of some contain the aspirations of others. In combination, they keep the ship of state on an even keel. What

drives democracy forward is the moral strength of better men and women who take the helm less because they want it than because they believe they are obliged to.

Spielberg’s *Lincoln* film is the acme of movies that set out how, simultaneously, amazing and ordinary men (and only the greatest are both) use politics to defeat politicians. It is the story of a leader whose deals did not deny his decency.

And if you doubt that anybody is this idealistic you are not paying much attention to American public life. A belief that politics is far too important to leave to ordinary politicians is at the heart of the bitter abuse that dogs debate from Congress to cable channels.

This is what made Spielberg’s film such a success. The film demonstrated how Lincoln used political skills to pursue a moral purpose. Yes, this is as improbable as it is unfamiliar for Australians. Referenda created our commonwealth. We did not have a war of independence, plus a second struggle to establish the principle of majority rule and end the stain of slavery. Even today, the Yanks need ideals to explain their bloody history to themselves.

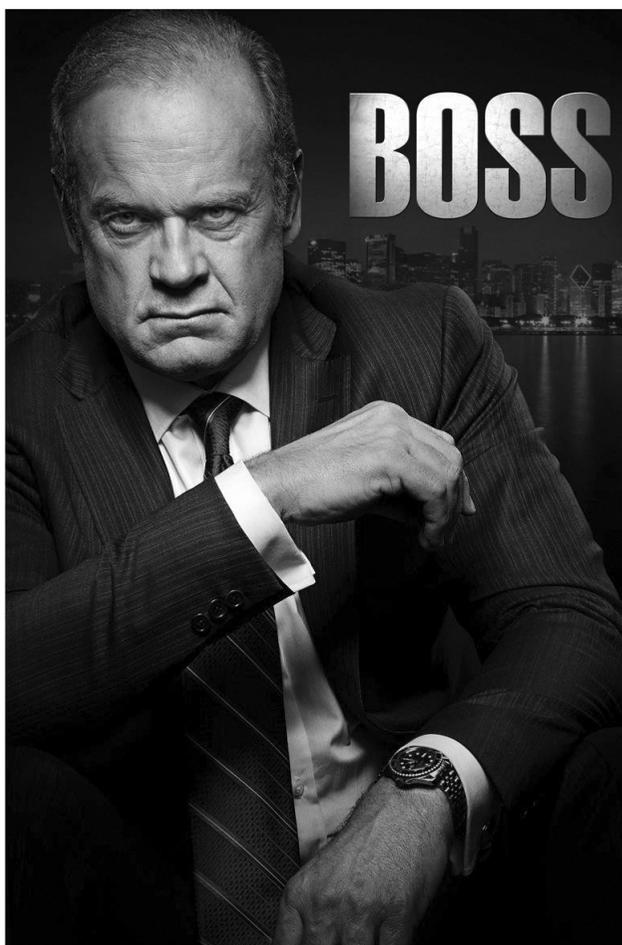


Which makes *Lincoln* less a film about the practice of politics than the moral obligation, for those who can bear the burden, to govern for good.

A great deal is made of the importance of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals* in the making of the film. Indeed, her book is a fine study of how Lincoln created a government from a Cabinet consisting of men with far more experience than he had, including two who, at first, thought they would be better as president.<sup>v</sup>

But, to understand just what a fine job Spielberg and scriptwriter Tony Kushner did you need to read Michael Burlingame's just short of a thousand-page life of Lincoln, the only political biography of our age to equal, perhaps best, Robert Caro's life of Lyndon Baines Johnson.<sup>v</sup>

While Burlingame describes rather than judges, he makes clear that Lincoln was an extraordinary individual who combined a genius for the practice of power with a respect for and understanding of individuals. While the former is much more common than the latter in politics there are always people in public life with one or the other. In combination, they are less rare than all but unique and it was his innate decency and judgement that equipped Lincoln for the



three all but inconceivable things he accomplished in just four years.

## A QUESTION OF CHARACTER

Lincoln fought and won a civil war while the people continued to vote on his performance at any number of local, state and national elections. He convinced enough of the country to accept the end of slavery. And he established forever the idea that republican democracy was a viable form of government – by no means an assured thing in the 1860s.

Lincoln less bent people to his will than variously won their affection or obedience, grudging or otherwise, through his decency. Hating Lincoln said much more about the character of his enemies than about the man.

Thus Burlingame describes the strength of Lincoln's character, and the way he is presented in the film:

**His remarkable ability to overcome the petty tyranny of the ego; to be humble despite being endowed with such enormous power; to have a kind of psychological maturity and rootedness that is remarkable in any situation, but especially in politics, where the tyranny of the ego is so strong.**<sup>vi</sup>

Lincoln has long set the standard by which all American politicians are judged, in high art and popular culture both. Who would have paid to see *Millard Fillmore*, *Vampire Hunter*? His depiction in films and television, “tell[s] us much more about who we are than they tell about the man himself, and more about the nature of visual media than the significance of history ... (he is) the Lincoln we need him to be”.<sup>vii</sup>

As such, Lincoln makes the anti-politician in office the gold standard of American politics. Barack Obama ran for a second term as an outsider, promising, for example, to take on the insiders who keep college too expensive.<sup>viii</sup> That a sitting president could play the reforming card says a great deal about Mr Obama's ability to keep a straight face. That the electorate adored it, demonstrates how anxious Americans are to embrace outsiders as the only efficacious antidote to secret deals done in the corridors of power.

It is a trope that started when Americans railed against the House of Commons, not Congress. By 1776 the political machine greased by public money spent on and in parliament, that Sir Robert Walpole established 60 years prior and Lord North attempted to extend, was considered a universal threat to good government. As Gordon Wood famously explained,

from the gestation of the great republic the intent of insiders was always suspect: “The Crown, in its painful efforts to build majorities through borough-mongering and the distribution on patronage was in fact bribing its way into tyranny.”<sup>x</sup>

The electorate’s horror of the political class is best expressed in the way Sorkin’s Jed Bartlet and Spielberg/Kushner’s Abraham Lincoln defeat the professionals by playing the political game better than their insider opponents, without losing sight of their moral objective.

“Well, I’m not going to negotiate with anyone who holds a gun to my head. We had a deal. I don’t care if my approval ratings drop into single digits. I am the President of the United States, and I will leave the government shut down until we come to an equitable agreement,” President Bartlet says, before outsmarting Congressional Republicans by walking down the mall to the Capitol in search of a compromise.<sup>x</sup>

“I am the president of the United States of America, clothed in immense power! You will procure me those votes!” writer Tony Kushner has Spielberg’s Lincoln angrily announce.

The irony is intentional, for all the immensity of his power Lincoln must wheel and deal, bribe and beg for the votes in the House of Representatives to pass the 13th Amendment. The real Lincoln probably never said it, the source is a politician’s memory recorded in the 1880s. But it makes the dramatic point – great causes are not enough in themselves to bring political insiders to good causes.<sup>xi</sup>

## FOR THE PEOPLE?

There are all sorts of popular culture precedents of the decent outsider taking on complacent or corrupt Washington on TV and in the movies. And they generally reflect the national mood.

During the Depression, the political caste appeared as insiders distributing pork for their pals. Jefferson Smith defeats the machine that sews his state up in *Mr Smith goes to Washington* by using insider tactics for a higher purpose. His Senate filibuster shames machine men into abandoning their plot against him. And his inspiration is not the slaver princeling he is named for but occurs when he stands at the Lincoln Memorial and reads the words of the Second Inaugural and Gettysburg Address.<sup>xii</sup>

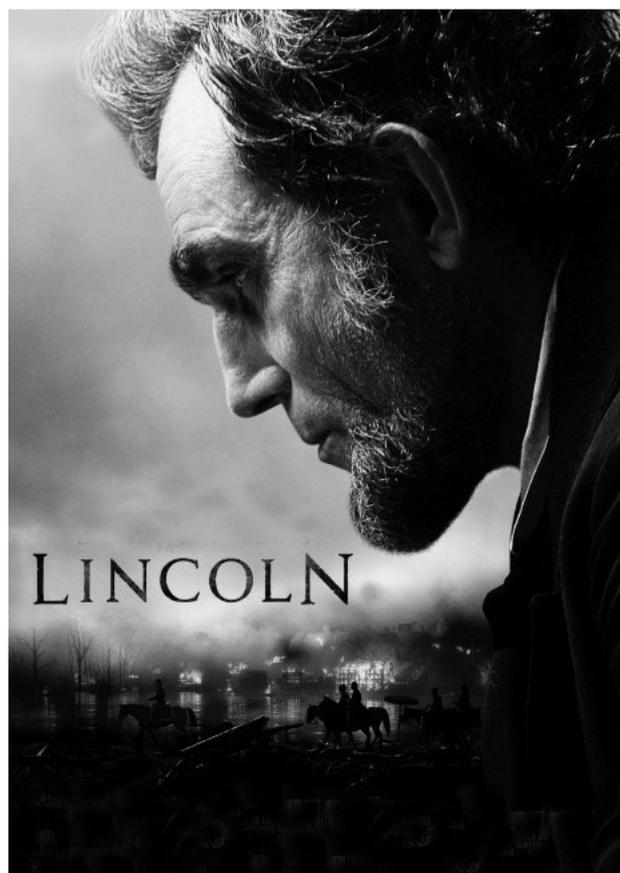
And so, for decades, the political professionals were presented as crooks and con artists, when they weren’t dills and dupes. There are many more films like *Advise and Consent*, *The Best Man*, *All the Presidents Men* and *Being There* than there are

movies that present politics as a craft for a few good persons, if there are any at all.

However, the Clinton ascendancy saw a remarkable change, with politics, at least the presidency, presented as a power for good. In *Dave* presidential look-alike Dave Kovic is put in the job when the real president has a stroke, but rather than be a pawn of White House cynical staffers he starts governing in the interests of ordinary Americans rather than insider aristos. “So I’ve decided that while I’m President, I should actually try to do things ... even if they seem impossible,” he says.<sup>xiii</sup>

There was much, much, more of the same in Rob Reiner and Aaron Sorkin’s *The American President*. In a prescient demonstration of how the liberal left would respond to conservative populists a decade later, President Andrew Shepherd attacks an opponent of gun reform and emissions reduction who attacks his private life:

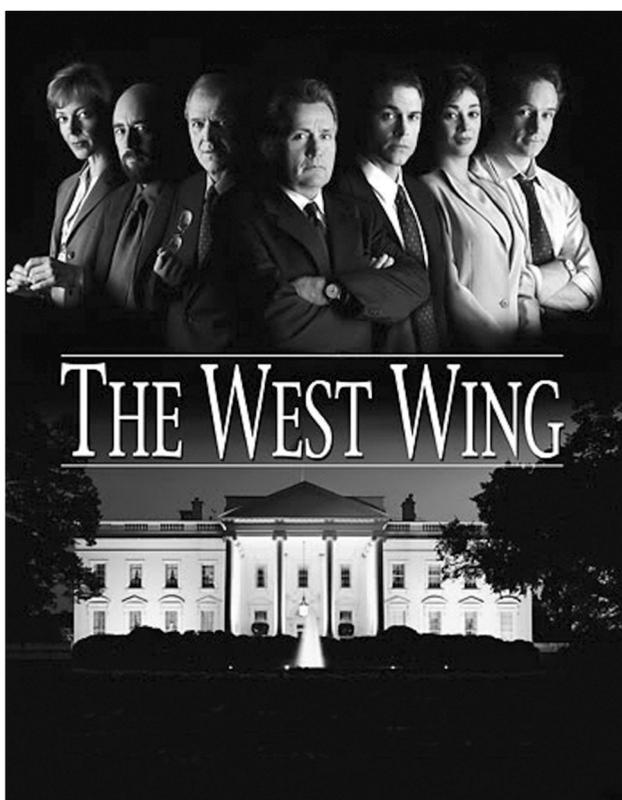
**We have serious problems to solve, and we need serious men to solve them. And whatever your particular problem is, friend, I promise you, Bob Rumson is not the least bit interested in solving it. He is interested in two things and two things only: Making you afraid of it and telling you who’s to blame for it.**<sup>xiv</sup>



There was a stack more of the same in Rod Lurie's *The Contender*, in which liberals are good men and women, focused on affirmative action administration while Republicans are mad, bad and dangers to democracy. As President Jackson Evans puts it, in demanding the legislature endorse the woman he wants as vice president;

**So, ladies and gentlemen of this Congress, it pains my soul to tell you that you have brought blood and shame under this great dome. Your leadership has raised the stakes of hate to a level where we can no longer separate the demagogue from the truly inspired. And believe this, there are traitors among us. And I'm not talking about those of you who sided against your party leadership. I'm talking about those of you who were patriots to your party but traitors to the necessary end result: That of righteousness, the truth, the concept of making the American dream blind to gender.<sup>xv</sup>**

Of course it could not last, Clinton's "I did not have sex with that woman" statement saw to that, dividing the country and crippling the idea of president as people's philosopher prince. (Failed Republican attempts to prove there was a White Water conspiracy when there wasn't did not help either.) The change came around the turn of the century when optimism was no longer enough and writers



turned to making movies about the moral challenge of leadership.

Which is why for all its romanticised band of brilliant brothers and sisters stuff *The West Wing* is, like Spielberg's *Lincoln*, a study of the limits to power and of the moral strength required of leaders to hold true to their beliefs while making least bad decisions. As Melissa Crawley puts it, Soorkin framed President Bartlet in *The West Wing* as "an ethical virtuous man who is often forced by institutional forces to act against his nature. In this way, Bartlet's choices are sacrifices".<sup>xvi</sup>

For the first two series *The West Wing* was a string of tutorials about the dissonance between politics and policy, executive and legislative branches of government. In series one, there is an episode about rounding up votes for gun reform, another about containing congressional mischief designed to out Leo McGarry as a recovering alcoholic and substance abuser.<sup>xvii</sup> In series two there are episodes intended to demonstrate how family transcends politics – what is it with Americans and family as the basis of all human existence? The difference between governing and electioneering is a constant theme. Above all there is a real sense of how chaotically exhausting office is.<sup>xviii</sup>

It was immensely patriotic; assuring Americans that if reality was even half as good the country was in the very best of hands. Or as one academic predictably put it:

**Ideology is most effective when people don't realise they are being subjected to it. Not only is this the case with *TWW*, but viewers actually believe that, if there is an ideological message in the program, it is coming from the left and not from the right. In this way, *The West Wing* functions effectively as a tool for the power elite, subliminally reinforcing the values and ideals of the ruling class.<sup>xix</sup>**

Quite. However, among us lackeys of the oppressors, it was one for the wonks, there isn't a once and future ministerial staffer alive who does not dream of working for a brilliant boss like President Bartlet and with his smart and saintly staff (no feuds or factions).

## TO SAVE THE NATION

But 9/11 changed the series. President Bartlet became Lincoln-like, sacrificing himself to save the nation. The destruction of the Twin Towers occurred before the third series started and a one-off special episode was dropped in to address the issues that all Americans confronted in the aftermath of the attack.

While the president's MS probably took up more airtime in the series that followed, the way he was prepared to risk his presidency to protect the country and its core values set the tone for the remaining 80 episodes. Just as Lincoln was prepared to do anything within, and occasionally without, the constitution to save the union so Bartlet was willing to order a murder to protect democracy and the rule of law.

He set out what was to come in the 2001 extra episode *Isaac and Ishmael*, "A martyr would rather suffer death at the hands of an oppressor than renounce his beliefs. Killing yourself and innocent people to make a point is sick, twisted, brutal, dumb-ass murder. ... we don't need martyrs right now. We need heroes. A hero would die for his country but he'd much rather live for it."<sup>xxi</sup>

Bartlet is forced to help the heroes against the fanatics when confronted with proof that a minister in the government of a Middle East ally is actually an Osama bin Laden-like terrorist leader. After a plot to blow up the Golden Gate Bridge is detected the president's chief of staff, Leo McGarry, and the security service chiefs argue that the only way to end the threat is to assassinate the terrorist. The way Bartlet agonises over the decision is some of Sorkin's finest writing. There are no set speeches as the president struggles with the need to do something wrong for the right reason.

BARTLET - *Civilians get trials.*

LEO - *I'd argue he's not a civilian. So would the Attorney General.*

BARTLET - *They're gonna find out it's us. We could make it look like the plane went down, but they're gonna find out it's us, and I'm gonna be running for re-election while I'm fighting a war against Qumar.*

LEO - *That's why you want to say no?*

BARTLET - *I want him tried.*

LEO - *That can't happen.*

BARTLET - *I understand. ...*

LEO - *Would it be helpful if I brought you a list of names of Shareef's victims?*

BARTLET - *What do you want from me?*

LEO - *Who was the monk who wrote, "I always don't know the right thing to do, Lord, but I think the fact that I want to please you pleases you." You have two minutes, sir.*

BARTLET - *This isn't a matter of religion.*

LEO - *Yes, sir.*

BARTLET - *I recognise that there's evil in the world.*

LEO - *What is your objection exactly, sir?*

BARTLET - *Doesn't this mean we join the league of ordinary nations?*

LEO - *That's your objection? I'm not gonna have trouble saying the Pledge of Allegiance tomorrow.*

BARTLET - *That's not my objection.*

LEO - *Sir..*

BARTLET - *It's just wrong. It's absolutely wrong.*

LEO - *I know, but you have to do it anyway.*

BARTLET - *Why?*

LEO - *'Cause you won.*

Bartlet pauses. He starts to walk away, but he stops right in front of Leo's shoulder.

BARTLET - *Take him.*<sup>xxii</sup>

There it is. What the series came to stand for, how a great president (and Soorkin presents Bartlet as a political Prospero, only smarter and nicer) cannot escape politics. The question is, are all leaders trapped or can they transcend the inevitable deals and suspension of ideals that come with the job? In the end, *The West Wing* writers came up with their best possible answer – another liberal Democrat, Matt Santos, whose campaign is the story of the last series, succeeds President Bartlet and the struggle to do right rolls on.

In contrast, Lincoln's assassination ensured that he departed the presidency in triumph, having achieved his original war aim, of holding the union together and also ending slavery. Spielberg and Kushner explain how he did the latter in a film, which is in essence a parliamentary procedural, about the way he and his agents beg and bribe, intimidate and ingratiate themselves with House members to get the votes to pass the 13th Amendment.

But what makes it fascinating is Daniel Day Lewis's extraordinary interpretation of the way, and why, Lincoln did it – how he played his politics hard without being corrupted in the process. There is general scholarly agreement that Day Lewis has caught Lincoln's gait and voice.<sup>xxiii</sup> And anybody who has read Lincoln's letters will know that Day Lewis presents the way Lincoln actually talked to people. But what is most important is the way the actor shows the president's enormous character and portrays his ability to play the politics that had to be played without being devoured by it.

As David Brooks puts it: "The challenge of politics lies precisely in the marriage of high vision and low cunning. Spielberg's Lincoln gets this point. The hero

has a high moral vision, but he also has the courage to take morally hazardous action in order to make that vision a reality.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

There is probably only one other reforming president who came anywhere near Lincoln in changing the republic - Lyndon Baines Johnson. But LBJ was an insider, as ruthless as he was ambitious, incapable of understanding that other people were not as obsessed with power as he was. Perhaps serving a full second term would have also reduced Lincoln, but what the record shows is an outsider who used politics to do right rather than an operator who did well in politics.

*Lincoln*, like *The West Wing*, like all the movies about anti-politicians doing good in politics is a love letter to the Constitution and the political culture it created, a belief that to be really great politicians must be truly good and that those who are deliver on Lincoln’s promise that government for the people, by the people shall not perish from the earth.

And that inevitably means working with the system the founding fathers created – neither the Bartlet nor Lincoln administrations are imperial presidencies. That both men steer the ship of state between the scylla of reactionary Republicans and the charybdis of populist Democrats is the core of their achievement and what distinguishes them from the villains of our times on television, Chicago mayor Tom Kane (Kelsey Grammer) in *Boss* and House Majority Whip Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) in *House of Cards*.<sup>xxv</sup>

*Lincoln*’s context is dark and bloody, a brutal war not yet won, a nation divided over what should follow, a generation crippled by grief and death. New research now puts casualties at a staggering 750,000, 20 per cent up on the orthodoxy, from a total population of 31 million.<sup>xxvi</sup> And yet the film is nowhere near as dark as *Boss* or *House of Cards*, which are both Jacobean dramas, melodramas if the sex and death in both strikes you as overblown. It’s amazing how priapic people in contemporary politics are and how easy it is to knock them off, and up.

## NO ABSOLUTE POWER

Both series are about power, the getting and keeping it, both focus on men who have long lost sight that politics is what you do to make policy. To demonstrate their slide into an abyss of ambition, where politics is played for no reason other than so the winners can impose their will on their colleagues, the writers of both series make it clear that both men could have been reformers. Kane wants to grow Chicago-land by expanding O’Hare Airport.

Underwood negotiates an education reform deal that reduces the power of teacher unions, albeit as an auxiliary to an enormous plot.

But policy exists only to feed their ambition. Kane and Underwood are the insiders that every Lincoln-like figure on TV and in the movies confronts and the enormous popularity of the two series, especially *House of Cards* which presents Congress as utterly self-absorbed, shows how US audiences are thoroughly sick of the legislative gridlock in Washington and why they responded so well to Spielberg’s *Lincoln*.

I have no idea what happens to Tom Kane in the final series of *Boss* or Frank Underwood in the next series of *House of Cards* but my guess is that they lose in the end – because politicians, as opposed to policy professionals in politics, always do in the end. (In fantasy and reality both.) They never know when to leave, they do not distinguish between the deals that matter and those that don’t and the content of their characters is not up to the job.

But Lincoln’s was. As Burlingame puts it: “Lincoln’s personality was the North’s secret weapon in the Civil War, the key variable that spelled the difference between victory and defeat. He was a model of psychological maturity, a fully individuated man who attained a level of consciousness unrivaled in the history of American public life. He managed to be strong-willed without being willful, righteous without being self-righteous, and moral without being moralistic.

Most politicians, indeed most people, are dominated by their own petty egos. They take things personally, try to dominate one another, waste time and energy on feuds and vendettas, project their unacceptable qualities onto others, displace anger and rage, and put the needs of their own clamorous egos above all other considerations. A dramatic exception to this pattern, Lincoln achieved a kind of balance and wholeness.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

In politics it takes a real grown-up to get things done.

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- <sup>iii</sup> John Weiner, “The trouble with Stephen Spielberg’s ‘Lincoln’ ” *The Nation* November 26 2012, @ <http://goo.gl/NSylDN> recovered on July 29
- <sup>iv</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of rivals: the political genius of Abraham Lincoln* (2006)
- <sup>v</sup> Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: a life* (Baltimore, 2008)

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- xix Richard Lee, "How The West Wing functions as a tool for the ruling elite," @ <http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/~rlee/twu.doc> recovered on July 29
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# BOOK REVIEWS

Ross Fitzgerald

Alan Gregory, *Woodfull* (Melbourne High School, Forrest Hill, South Yarra, Victoria), pp 262, 2011;

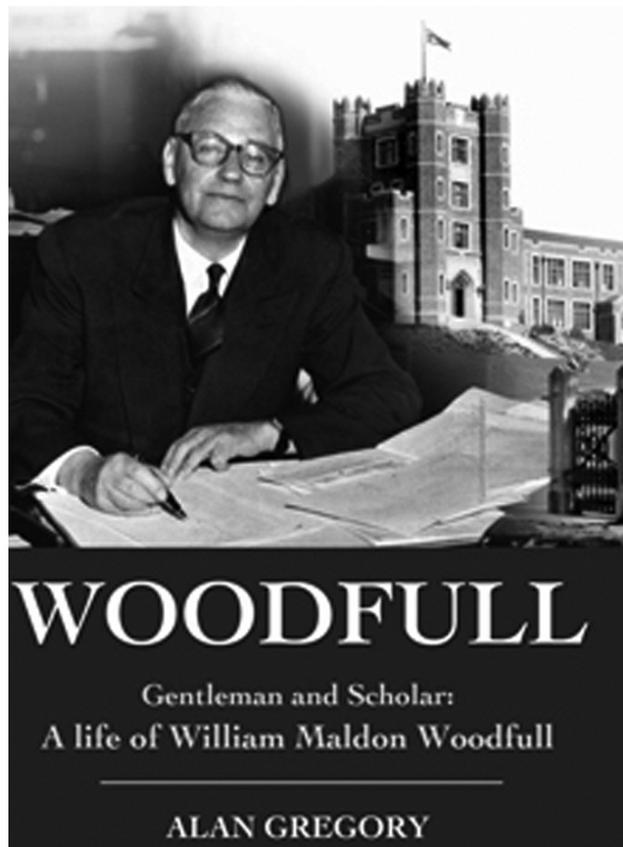
Paul Henderson, *Red & Black: The History of the Old Xaverians Football Club* (Impress Print Management, Port Melbourne, Victoria), pp 414, 2013;

Paul Daffey & John Harms, (eds) *Footy Town* (Malarkey Publications, Fitzroy North, Victoria) pp 382, 2013;

Helen Trinca, *Madeleine: A Life of Madeleine St John* (Text Publishing: Melbourne, Victoria) pp 280.

## WOODFULL

Faced with reviewing four books it seems fitting that a cricket tragic should turn his attention first to Alan Gregory's finely nuanced biography of former Australian cricket captain, Bill Woodfull.



Born William Maldon Woodfull in Maldon, Victoria in 1897 - the son of a Methodist country parson - he had a first-class batting average of 64.99, including 49 centuries.

However, Woodfull is best known for being an extremely successful Test cricket captain (God knows we need to read about one of those at the moment) and especially for his heroism during England's infamous "Bodyline" tour of Australia in 1932-1933. As a Test batsman, facing good bowlers, Woodfull averaged 46 runs per innings - a fine performance.

An essentially modest man and a devoted Christian, Woodfull primarily thought of himself as a teacher who happened to play cricket. Hence he regarded his time as principal of Melbourne High School, where he had previously studied and worked, as being the apex of his life's achievements.

As befits the author of *Strong Like its Pillars* - a very fine centenary history of my alma mater Melbourne High School published in 2005 - the most important parts of Gregory's fine biography deal with the years when Woodfull was in charge of this high-achieving academic and sports-oriented all-boys school, from 1956 to 1962 inclusively.

There were hugely talented and highly motivated students like David Parkin (later a famous Aussie Rules premiership player and coach); Alex Wodak (who was to become a NSW-based drug law reformer); Garry Evans (who later changed his name to Gareth) and athlete Ralph Doubell (who won a

Gold Medal in the 800 metres at Mexico in 1968).

I count myself extremely fortunate to have studied at Melbourne High when Woodfull was principal. This is in large part because he had either recruited to the school, or managed to retain, such a fine body of teachers across many disciplines. This corps of talented teachers, most of whom stayed at Melbourne High for all their teaching careers, more than rivalled their elite private school counterparts.

The Melbourne High staff photo for 1962 depicts Graham Worrall - one of the school's most brilliant history teachers. While the school's other great history teacher, Ben Munday, stayed at Melbourne High, Graham Worrall became a lecturer in History at my other alma mater, Monash University, where he continued to inspire a generation of students.

Alan Gregory's account of the 1930 Ashes tour of England - where Bill Woodfull, Don Bradman and Alan Kippax starred with the bat along with Clarrie Grimmett with the ball - provides new insights. Bradman's clash with some of his Catholic colleagues (such as Bill O'Reilly) has frequently been explained with reference to the Protestant/Catholic sectarian divide of the day.

Gregory demonstrates that Woodfull (who destroyed his letters before he died) also had difficulties with Bradman's lack of team spirit and general stinginess but never indicated this in public. Like Bradman, Woodfull was a Protestant and a teetotaler.

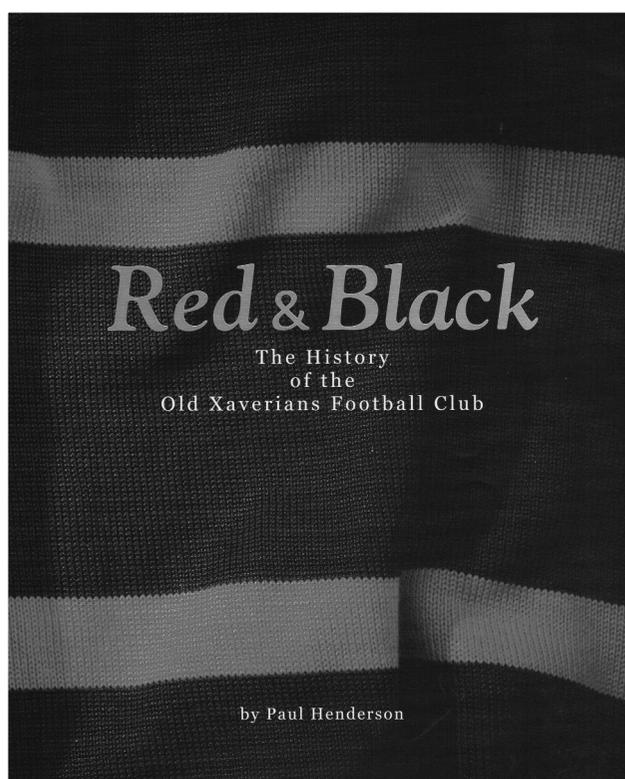
Clearly it was not only Catholics who had problems with Bradman. Don Bradman did not play in Bill Woodfull's testimonial match - nor did he attend his retirement function as Melbourne High School principal - unlike most of Woodfull's team mates who were still alive. Alan Gregory quotes cricketer Bill Ponsford, a friend of Woodfull, as saying that Woodfull felt let-down by Bradman but refused to elaborate on the matter.

## RED & BLACK

The Old Xaverians Amateur Football Club was founded in 1923 and in this carefully researched, chronological narrative, *Red & Black* (which by the way are the anarchist colours) Paul Henderson deftly deals with the club's 90-year history.

As befits a longtime teacher of history and politics at Xavier College, Henderson impressively blends football and politics. Indeed some would say that, far too often, in real life the two are, unfortunately, one and the same thing.

To this reviewer, the highlights of Henderson's lengthy book deal with sectarianism during the First World War and the 1920s, fascinating as social



history, and also with the interconnected roles of Melbourne's long-serving Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, the Irish-born Daniel Mannix, and the influential Irish Jesuit priest Father William Hackett, who was an ardent Irish republican.

Intriguingly to an historian and teetotaler like myself, I found Henderson's discussion of the changing role of alcohol and the footy club to be quite fascinating. From time to time, it seems that some members of the Old Xavierians advocated prohibition and I say – more power to them!

*Red & Black* also deals in some detail with that well-known, Collingwood-based, "entrepreneur", "philanthropist", and Aussie Rules enthusiast, John Wren, who was a lifetime supporter of the mighty Magpies.

A fascinating episode in Henderson's footy club history is the fact that, in 1928, almost certainly with the financial and personal aid of Wren, the Old Xavierians managed to secure as coach the hugely successful coach of the Collingwood Football Club, Jock McHale. As Henderson points out, by 1928 McHale had coached the Woodsmen for 16 years, including already winning VFL premierships in 1911, 1919, and 1927.

Although McHale was extremely busy at Collingwood, he did manage to come to coach this team of dedicated amateurs most Wednesdays evenings. Hence, although he could not attend Old Xaverian games on Saturdays, for three years during the footy season he took charge of training one night a week. As was written by a club spokesman in *The Xaverian* at the time: "The great improvement in the play of the team was entirely due to (McHale's) coaching and advice, and there is no doubt that we owe much of our success to his hard work and enthusiasm."

My favorite photo in this finely illustrated book is that of the E Grade Reserve Team, taken in 1965. Intriguingly, the middle row features the author's brother, now executive director of The Sydney Institute – a stern looking Gerard Henderson. In the same row stands future Howard government minister Richard Alston and his brother Ian.

Prominent AFL footballers who have played with, or coached, the Old Xavierians include Terry Callan (Geelong), Jack Clarke (Essendon), Trevor Gowers (Richmond), Andrew Gowers (Hawthorn), Michael Green (Richmond), Craig Kelly (Collingwood), Des Meagher (Hawthorn), Barry Richardson (Richmond) and Alan Woodley (Hawthorn).

The two weaknesses of this engaging amateur football history are the lack of an index plus the fact that the typeface could be larger. But, despite all that, the book itself is a joy to read and hold.

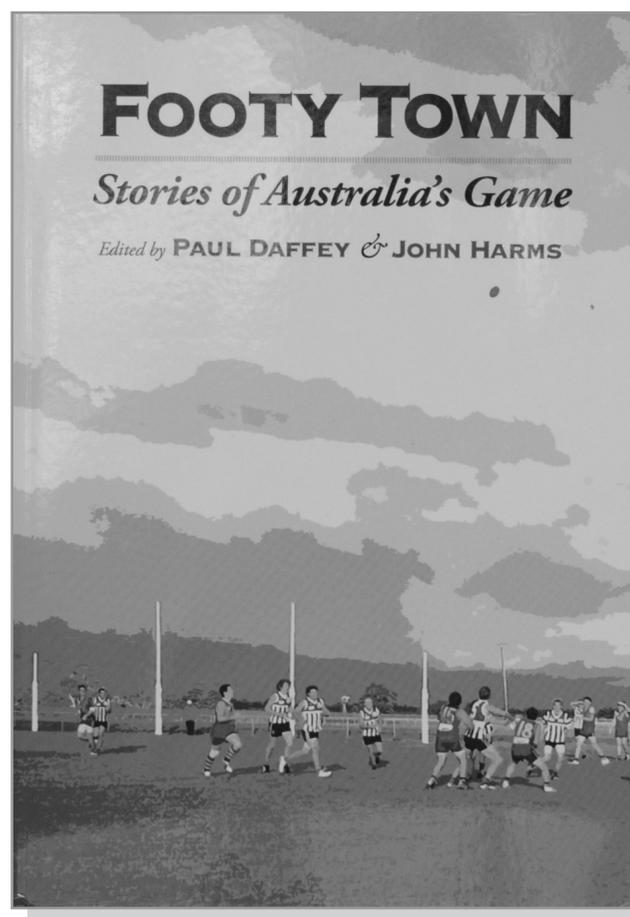
## FOOTY TOWN

Far less successful as an integrated book than Paul Henderson's magisterial history of the Old Xaverians is Paul Daffey and John Harms' edited collection of Aussie Rules football yarns, called *Footy Town*.

Published by Malarkey Publications in Fitzroy North, Victoria, this strangely titled book is rather disjointed and the typeface is small. Those of us of a certain age must rebel against such technicalities, while we still can.

There are, however, some highlights in the book – especially a number of contributions about country football. There is also an energetically irreverent essay by the irrepressible Barry Dickens. Unambiguously titled "Go Lator, You Pricks!" Dickens deals with the Lator Football Club, in outer suburban Melbourne, founded in 1955. As the piece points out, this team managed to produce two of the Carlton Football Club's all time stars – namely Lance Whitnall and Anthony Koutoufides.

Perhaps the best and most intriguing piece, and the last in the collection, is by the talented Harms himself. "In Time and in Eternity" deals with the ragbag of players associated with the Adelaide Lutheran Football Club – nicknamed the Bulldogs – whose home ground is at Doggie Park, South Parklands. If what Harms writes is true, between



1985 and 1993 he played two C Grade games for the Doggies, and kicked one goal! Well done John.

The fourth book in my pile has, on the face of it, at least one thing in common with the other three – they are all published in Victoria.

## MADELEINE

Co-author of two previous books – *Waterfront: The Battle that Changed Australia* and *Better than Sex: How a Whole Generation Got Hooked on Work* - author Helen Trinca has excelled herself in *Madeleine* - a moving and detailed account of the life of a deeply troubled and highly talented expatriate Australian novelist.

As Madeleine St John destroyed most of her papers before she died, Trinca, an experienced and much-admired journalist, could only tell Madeleine's life story with the aid of her family and friends. In particular, Madeleine's sister Colette St John Lippincott generously provided Trinca with a key part of this fine biography – namely the psychiatric records of their tragic alcoholic French mother Sylvette, who committed suicide when Madeleine and Colette were young.

The other sad reality is that Madeleine St John loathed her father, Edward St John - the noted QC



and independent-minded Liberal MHR for the safe Sydney outer suburban seat of Warringah - now held by Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott.

Although, at the time, many artistic and other Aussies headed for London to seek fame if not fortune, there are some hints in the book that at least in part Madeleine left Sydney to escape her detested but, in my opinion, much-wronged – at least by his daughters – locally famous father.

Madeleine's crucial time in London also could only be told with the detailed assistance of a number of friends, including her avid supporters, Clive James, Germaine Greer, Peter Porter and Barry Humphries. The latter had written enthusiastically and expansively in *The Spectator* about Madeleine's first novel *The Women in Black* – which was set in post-war Sydney.

An overblown paean of praise from the novelist, essayist and poet Clive James is featured on the front page of *Madeleine*. The Australian expat is quoted as saying: "The only lasting fame for any of the rest of us will reside in the fact that we once knew her (i.e. Madeleine)." Even for James, this is hyperbole.

Yet, as a writer, while Madeleine St John may not have been all that influential, she was certainly industrious and well thought of, especially in English literary circles.

The fact is that, in October 1997, as Trinca records, Madeleine's third novel, *The Essence of the Thing* was short-listed for the Booker Prize. St John was an eight to one outsider. However, the noted English writer, A.S. Byatt, opined that *The Essence of the Thing* excited her more than all the other novels.

Although St John did not win the Booker, being short-listed could be seen as vindication that Madeleine had somehow succeeded - despite the opposition of many members of her family. As Trinca puts it, had she won the prize, "the sweetest victory of all would be over her father, Edward St John – politician, barrister and pillar of the community. Ted had died in 1994, but his daughter still had scores to settle."

In the main, this well illustrated and carefully indexed biography is thoroughly researched and, as befits a journalist of Helen Trinca's calibre, is extremely well written.

The reality is that *Madeleine*, like *Woodfull*, is a fine piece of work that deserves to be widely read. In my opinion, both Alan Gregory and Helen Trinca do their diverse subjects proud.

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# THE ASYLUM SEEKER DEBATE - AND THE HISTORICAL CONFUSION OF DAVID MARR AND JULIAN BURNSIDE

CONCERNING GOUGH WHITLAM, MALCOLM FRASER, BOB HAWKE, JOHN HOWARD & KEVIN RUDD

In a recent speech to The Sydney Institute, historian David Pryce Jones commented that one of the defining features of intellectuals who engage in public debate is an over-use of the word “must”. The point was that intellectuals like telling governments and others what they “must” do.

Among the public intellectuals who are intent on telling both Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott what they must do concerning unauthorised boat arrivals are journalists David Marr and barrister Julian Burnside.

## DAVID MARR’S HOWLERS – NOW AND THEN

On 22 July 2013, David Marr re-entered the debate on asylum seekers with a denunciation in *The Guardian Australia* of Kevin Rudd’s decision to send all asylum seekers arriving by boat to Papua New Guinea. Towards the end of his article, titled “Captain Rudd steers Australia into new depths of shame”, David Marr wrote:

**Bogus asylum seekers must be weeded out and returned. The entry points of the trade – the airports of Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur – must be plugged, as the foreign minister, Bob Carr, has gone some way to do in the last week. The criminal combines driving the trade must be broken. We need to redouble the help we give Indonesian police. Australia must make it easier – rather than harder – for asylum seekers to come by air.**

That’s four “musts” in just five sentences. David Marr proffered no such advice – about returning bogus

asylum seekers or plugging Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur airports or tackling people smugglers – when John Howard was prime minister. Indeed Marr was one of the principal critics of the Howard government’s policies on preventing unauthorised boat arrivals. Yet the situation which Rudd faces in mid-2013 is not significantly different from the situation which Howard faced in the early 2000s. Then, as today, there were bogus asylum seekers and many asylum seekers sought entry to Australia by boat after flying into Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur and destroying their visas and/or identity papers. Also criminal gangs were driving the people smuggler industry.

Responding to criticism by Nick Cater that Marr might not criticise Rudd for his PNG solution, Marr wrote to *The Australian* on 22 July 2013 saying that he had denounced Prime Minister Rudd in his *Guardian* piece. Well, not really. Sure, Marr said that “Kevin Rudd has taken Australia lower than it has ever gone before”. But Marr partly rationalised Rudd’s stance as due to “the relentless encouragement of Tony Abbott”. The familiar “Blame Abbott” line. Marr also attacked the stance of such Coalition figures as Scott Morrison and Malcolm Turnbull – but not former Labor prime minister Julia Gillard. Yet, in her years as prime minister, Gillard took a tough stance on asylum seekers.

Since David Marr is an influential figure in the Australian public debate, who has ready access to ABC TV and ABC Radio studios, it is important to correct the errors in his *Guardian* piece before they become enmeshed in *Australian* mythology. Here they are:

- **According to Marr:**

**Bribing Papua New Guinea to take our refugees may seem an unimaginable course for a civilised country to take. But this is Australia. We do xenophobia well. We shut our doors on Jews before the second world war.**

In fact, Australia did not shut its doors on Jews before the Second World War. Certainly Australia could have settled more Jews, who were fleeing the Nazi regime, than it did. But Australia settled more European Jews than many other nations and Jews were not excluded from Australia at the time. Anne Henderson documents in *Joseph Lyons: The People’s Prime Minister* that, in late 1938, after Kristallnacht, the Lyons-led United Australia Party government agreed to settle 15,000 refugees from Germany over three years – to consist of Aryans, non-Aryan Christians and Jews alike.

As Hilary L. Rubenstein pointed out in *The Jews in Australia Volume 1 1788-1945*, 4000 of the 5000 annual places were reserved for Jews. Refugee intake ceased with the commencement of hostilities in September 1939. But 5000 Jewish refugees arrived in Australia in 1939. In *Edge of the Diaspora*, Suzanne D. Rutland recorded that the Lyons government eased the restrictions on non-British Jews entering

Australia in 1936. In the *Australian Jewish News* on 26 July 2013, Professor Bill Rubenstein pointed out that this “was the first time Australia had admitted any refugees”. David Marr is a self-declared leftist who likes to criticise conservatives wherever possible. The UAP government of the 1930s is but one of his targets. There are others.

- **According to Marr:**

**From the time that first boat arrived – the Kein Giang with five Vietnamese men on board – in April 1976, both sides of politics have made the same promise to the nation: to stop the boats, every single boat. There are too many coming now. Too many people are dying on the way. But we are not going to get anywhere while that toxic promise stays on the table.... No leader since has had the courage to tell Australians what the rest of the world knows: that refugees flee however they may – by air, by land and by sea. Instead, every prime minister since the Kein Giang tied up in Darwin harbor has promoted the Australian delusion that it’s wrong – indeed evil – for refugees to climb into a boat.**

It is true that, when prime minister, Malcolm Fraser favoured the off-shore processing of Indo-Chinese refugees and that only 2059 Indo-Chinese arrived in Australia by boat between the beginning of 1976 and the end of 1982. However, it is not true that Fraser promised to stop “every single boat”. And it is not true that Fraser declared that it was “evil” for asylum seekers to enter Australia by boat. Quite the contrary – as the arrival in Darwin in late 1977 of an asylum seeker boat demonstrated.

In November 1977, just before the Federal election of that year, the *HMAS Ardent* intercepted a boat containing some 180 Vietnamese refugees, heading for Darwin. Bob Hawke was ALP national president at the time. In words that sounded remarkably similar to John Howard’s over two decades later, the (then) ALP national president opposed the arrival on Australian shores of “queue-jumping” boat people. Bob Hawke told a media conference in Hobart on 28 November 1977:

**Obviously there are people all around the world who have a strong case for entry into this country and successive governments have said we have an obligation, but we also have an obligation to people who are already here...Of course we should have compassion, but people who are coming in this way are not the only people in the world who have rights to our compassion. Any sovereign country has the right to determine how it will exercise its compassion and how it will increase its population.**

Bob Hawke was reported as calling on the Coalition government in late 1977 to make it clear that the asylum seekers had no right to land in Australia. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser rejected his advice. He said that Australia needed to make sure that the Vietnamese boat people were genuine refugees - but felt that the situation was under control. (See the broadsheet press of 29 November 1977 and after).

It is true that Bob Hawke was not alone in calling for a tough line on asylum seekers nearly four decades ago. According to a contemporaneous report in *The National Times* (12 December 1977), Hawke’s position was shared by senior Fraser government minister Peter Nixon. The Coalition’s Transport Minister was reported to have told a media conference in Darwin that refugees arriving illegally by boat in Australia would be turned around and sent back. Peter Nixon was quickly hauled into line by Malcolm Fraser. Subsequently, the Immigration Minister (Michael Mackellar) issued a statement declaring that “Australia will continue to accept Indo-Chinese refugees”. The Fraser Government went to the December 1977 Federal election with this policy.

Gough Whitlam, as Labor leader in 1977, did not repudiate Bob Hawke’s statement. Moreover, while acknowledging that “any genuine refugees should be accepted”, Whitlam maintained that “the [Fraser] Government has a responsibility to ensure they are genuine refugees” and that “it should also see that they don’t get ahead in the queue over people who have been sponsored and who are already coming here” (*The Age*, 29 November 1977). *The National Times* reported that, speaking in Darwin, Whitlam blamed Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew for the boat people reaching Australia’s shores. He was quoted as alleging that Singapore supplied the Indo-Chinese boat people with the “plans and petrol and the maps to get here” (*The National Times*, 12 December 1977).

In *The Guardian*, David Marr implied that Malcolm Fraser had declared when prime minister that it was “evil” for asylum seekers to arrive in Australia by boat. This is simply wrong. Also Marr overlooked Gough Whitlam’s hostility to boat arrivals in the mid 1970s. This is quite misleading since it implies that Gough Whitlam was accepting of Indo-Chinese refugees in 1975, 1976 and 1977 when this was emphatically not the case.

- **According to Marr:**

**Asylum seekers coming by air don’t trouble us. They aren’t dragged away from Tullamarine [Airport] and thrown into immigration prisons. But we have spent the best part of 40 years devising new insults and tougher punishments for those who dare to do what asylum seekers do in the Persian Gulf, the Caribbean and the Mediterranean: arrive by sea.**

This comment is hopelessly wrong – as has been pointed out to David Marr previously by Gerard Henderson. Speaking on *Insiders* on Sunday 14 November 2010, Marr said that asylum seekers who arrive by air are not put into mandatory detention. This led to the following email exchange:

**GERARD HENDERSON TO DAVID MARR –  
16 NOVEMBER 2010**

I enjoyed the discussion on *Insiders* last Sunday about asylum seekers. However, I believe it is appropriate to draw your attention to one error you made in case the issue is raised again on *Insiders* or elsewhere. On *Insiders* you said: “Nobody who flies into Australia and asks for refugee protection – they’re not put in detention and they have always been given access to the courts.”

The fact is that numerous asylum seekers who arrive by air and claim asylum are put into detention. This is common procedure. As you are aware, over recent years I have supported Anne Henderson’s advocacy on behalf of asylum seekers held in detention – many in Villawood. We have succeeded in all these cases – including the case of the three African Christians who were scheduled for immediate deportation and whose case I mentioned on *Insiders* on 11 July. The three Nigerians arrived at Melbourne Airport and were immediately placed in detention in Maribyrnong. They were subsequently transferred to detention in Villawood. In other words, they were treated no differently to asylum seekers who reach the Australian mainland by boat. In fact, most of the detainees which Anne and I helped over the years have arrived by air and were immediately placed in detention.

I know it is a widely held belief that asylum seekers who arrive by air are not placed in detention. But it is just a myth.

**DAVID MARR TO GERARD HENDERSON –  
16 NOVEMBER 2010**

Thanks. While obviously those who fly in seeking asylum often end up in detention some way down the track, I hadn’t realised some are immediately thrown into the slammer on arrival. For what reason? I suppose being black doesn’t help.

**GERARD HENDERSON TO DAVID MARR –  
22 NOVEMBER 2010**

Just to clarify. As I understand it, everyone who arrives in Australia by air without a valid visa – or who claims asylum on arrival – is placed into detention.

As you know, it’s very difficult to get on a flight destined for Australia without a valid visa. That is why large numbers of asylum seekers invariably arrive by boat. Also, it is not just Africans who come by air and seek asylum – so do Chinese and Vietnamese and some Sri Lankans. The Iraqis,

Afghans and Sri Lankans tend to come by boat because they can get access into such nations as Indonesia and Malaysia.

David Marr’s confusion underlies his lack of understanding of the asylum seeker issue. On *Insiders* on 7 July 2013, Marr said that it was “inexplicable” why asylum seekers who arrive by boat destroy their passports and/or identity papers. On the contrary, it is completely explicable. Asylum seekers who arrive by boat are invariably told by people smugglers to destroy their papers. This makes it much more difficult to determine whether those seeking asylum are genuine refugees.

David Marr’s article in *The Guardian* was not as critical of Kevin Rudd’s Papua New Guinea Solution as he maintains. Certainly there was none of the scathing criticism which Marr directed at John Howard in the early 2000s. Double standards aside, David Marr’s recent contribution to the asylum debate demonstrates that he does not fully understand the problems faced by the Rudd, Gillard and Howard governments. Moreover, there are numerous holes in his understanding of the history of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia.

**JULIAN BURNSIDE’S ERRORS – THEN  
AND NOW**

Julian Burnside QC’s analysis - both historical and contemporary - is as flawed as that of David Marr. Burnside has been consistently ill-informed on this issue for over a decade – since he entered the debate at the time of the Tampa incident before the 2001 election. Writing in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 15 February 2002, Burnside asserted:

**The White Australia policy both reflected and dominated Australia’s cultural attitude from the time before federation, until 1973. Then, under the newly elected Whitlam Labor Government, Australia undertook some bold experiments in cultural self-confidence. It withdrew from the war in Vietnam, and embraced the ideals of multiculturalism. It sought to position Australia as part of Asia, preferring the logic of geography to the habits of history. Since the dismissal of the Whitlam Government in 1975, Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers has been marked by a profound, but unarticulated, fear of an invasion from the north. It is based on a deeply anti-Asian prejudice, shared by Labor and Liberal governments alike. It has been pursued despite the protests of the international community.**

This paragraph is littered with errors. First, Harold Holt’s Coalition government abandoned the White Australia Policy in March 1966. Second, Australian

combat forces were withdrawn by William McMahon's Coalition government in 1971. Third, Australia's focus on Asia commenced as early as the 1930s during the time of Joseph Lyons' United Australia Party government. Fourth, since the abandonment of the White Australia Policy, hundreds of thousands of Asians have settled in Australia – there is no government inspired deep Asian prejudice in Australia.

It seems that Burnside has learnt nothing on this issue in the last decade. This is what he said on the ABC1 *News Breakfast* on 19 July 2013:

**Julian Burnside:** Of course it [the asylum seeker issue] will resonate with the people – as long as the people have been deceived by politicians who call boat people “illegals” and “queue jumpers” and paint them as if they are a threat to the community. Now, you know, everyone was hysterical about the quote/unquote “invasion” of boat people [sic] last twelve months. The number who arrived in Australia in the last twelve months was slightly fewer than the number who arrived each year from Indo-China in the late 1970s. There was no fuss about it then because Whitlam and Fraser decided to make a bi-partisan approach.

In recent interviews on the Sky News *Viewpoint* program (28 July) and on the ABC1 *Adam Hills' Tonight* program (31 July), Julian Burnside also said that there had been a bipartisan approach to asylum seekers taken by Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser in the second half of the early 1970s. He also claimed that, from 1976, some 25,000 boat people arrived in Australia annually. These comments were also littered with errors.

As documented above, Burnside claimed that 25,000 boat people arrived in Australia annually during the time of the Fraser government. In fact, a total of 2059 arrived in six years - an average of less than 300 a year.

In fact, Gough Whitlam demonstrated a visceral hatred of South Vietnamese refugees who sought to leave South Vietnam following the defeat of the Saigon government by communist North Vietnamese forces.. Burnside's *TLS* claim - which he has repeated since - has been refuted over the years by Gough Whitlam's one-time colleagues, by researchers and by critics alike.

Clyde Cameron was a Cabinet minister in the Whitlam government from December 1972 until November 1975. In his 1980 book *China, Communism and Coca-Cola*, Clyde Cameron referred to a meeting held between Gough Whitlam, his Foreign Minister Don Willesee and Cameron himself (as Immigration Minister) on 21 April 1975:

**Willesee is a compassionate human being who felt a sense of guilt over the Government's apparent lack of concern for**

**those Vietnamese who had been caught up on the wrong side in a civil war that was drawing to a sudden end. He had never worn his religion on his sleeve but deep down he was a devoted son of his Church and a Christian who tried hard to practise what he had been taught. He wanted Whitlam to recognise the realities of war and ease the restrictions applicable to other migrants.**

**Whitlam refused and I supported him, saying that I saw no reason why we should take the risk of opening our doors to war criminals. But Willesee argued that this was not the proposition he was putting and stubbornly refused to budge in his fight for what he regarded as the human approach. Finally Whitlam stuck out his jaw and, grinding his teeth, turned to Willesee and thundered, “I'm not having hundreds of f-cking Vietnamese Balts coming into this country with their religious and political hatreds against us!” Poor Don looked pleadingly towards me for help but I replied, “No, Don. I'm sorry mate, but I agree with Gough on this matter”. Indeed, not only did I agree with what he had said but I could have hugged him for putting my own view so well.**

Clyde Cameron's comment - as documented in *China, Communism and Coca-Cola* - has never been denied by Gough Whitlam.

Nancy Viviani came to a similar conclusion in her 1984 book *The Long Journey: Vietnamese Migration and Settlement in Australia* - where she wrote:

**On the evidence, it is clear that Australian refugee policy in 1975 was made by Whitlam. It lacked strong support in Cabinet and in the Caucus and the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Immigration had been largely excluded from policy process. In both its guises, in the April [1975] guidelines and in the later “international” effort, the intention of policy was to be as restrictive as possible. Not only were numbers restricted, but those with ties to the Saigon regime were avoided by not allowing students' parents to join them. It seems fair to conclude that Whitlam's chief motives were a straightforward concern to avoid a new influx of emotional anti-communists into Australian politics together with a care for the attitudes of Hanoi.**

In her book, Nancy Viviani (who was private secretary to Senator Willesee in 1974 and 1975) quoted Gough Whitlam as having said with respect to the South Vietnamese refugees in 1975: “These Vietnamese sob stories don't wring my withers.” Dr Viviani's source was the journalist Denis Warner, who wrote to the

Senate Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defence as follows:

**I have been told repeatedly by [Public Service] officials that Mr Whitlam accepted personal responsibilities for the admission, or otherwise, of all Vietnamese refugees wanting to come to Australia. I was told by one official that Mr Whitlam was quite unsympathetic. "These Vietnamese sob stories don't wring my withers," he is reported to have said. Mr Whitlam is also on record that there would be no reprisals in Vietnam and is privately said to hold the view that it would be better if the refugees returned there.**

**I am also informed by officials whose word I have no reason to doubt that the strict guidelines laid down for the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees were largely drawn up by the government of North Vietnam. Hanoi indicated that it did not want Australia to accept refugees "who had been forcibly evacuated by the Americans". In this category are all those refugees who went to Guam and Wake Island. Some exceptions were made to this and for a very brief period Australian Immigration officials were active on Guam, although, as the submission by Mr Nguyen Ngoc Phach indicates quite clearly, very little attempt was made to communicate with the many who wanted to go to Australia and had close relatives here. On the other hand, at least a token effort was made to bring in Vietnamese refugees from Hong Kong, though they had no close relations here.**

The Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – which reported on this issue in December 1976 – reached a similar conclusion to Dr Viviani. The committee was chaired by Senator J.P. Sim (who was a "moderate" Liberal) and included Labor MPs (Senator Gordon McIntosh, Senator Cyril Primmer and Senator Kerry Sibraa). The members of the committee agreed unanimously:

**In view of the Committee's belief that the Australian Government had been informed of the gravity and magnitude of the situation in South Vietnam some three weeks before the evacuation of the Australian Embassy, we are unable to come to any conclusion other than one of deliberate delay in order to minimise the number of refugees with which Australia would have to concern itself. In addition, we believe that the guidelines of 22 April [1975] were so narrowly drawn that very few refugees would qualify for entry to Australia. In all, 5629 nominations were**

**received but only 542 were approved – 355 for permanent residence and 187 for temporary residence. Of the 542 approved cases, less than 342 persons were informed of their approval in the four-day period prior to the Embassy's evacuation. Other than orphans, 78 Vietnamese nationals were evacuated from Saigon by Australia...**

As unpalatable as it may be, we are forced to conclude that the [Whitlam] Government acted reluctantly and, as expressed by one witness, in order to placate an increasingly suspicious Australian public. (See Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence *Australia and the Refugee Problem*, Parliamentary Paper No. 329/1976, 1 December 1976.)

An even more critical assessment was made by Hal. G. P. Colebatch in his 1995 Ph. D. thesis at the University of Western Australia titled "A History of Political Refugees: With particular reference to the case of the Vietnamese Boat People". Writing in *The Australian* on 20 August 2002, Dr Colebatch referred to the position taken by Labor identities both before and after the December 1975 election:

**Labor's immigration spokesman Tony Mulvihill demanded Vietnamese boat refugees be returned to Vietnam under armed escort. Future West Australian Labor premier Brian Burke demanded: "Halt this refugee flood!" Clyde Cameron, Gough Whitlam's immigration minister, talked of an "invasion". "These are rich people who have been racketeers, drug peddlers and, in some cases, prostitutes in their own country, some riddled with a form of venereal disease that cannot be cured. Never mind the niceties of sending people back somewhere they do not like." Cameron's very frank diaries make it clear the Left tried to exploit anti-refugee fears during the 1977 election.**

**There is an ancient tradition that no effort be spared saving life at sea. The captain of the *Tampa*, Arne Rinnan, was right to rescue people in distress a year ago. But so was Captain Norman Sloan of the Shell tanker in 1979 when he rescued 150 Vietnamese refugees from a sinking boat and took them to Darwin. During the *Tampa* episode, the Maritime Union of Australia slammed the Howard Government's "inappropriate" and "inhumane" actions which were "deserving of international condemnation." But two decades ago, waterside workers went on strike in protest against Vietnamese refugees, and threatened to blacklist all Shell Company ships - a clear disincentive to future rescues.**

## THE 1975 CABINET PAPERS REVEAL ALL

The assessment of Clyde Cameron, Nancy Viviani, Denis Warner, Hal Colebatch and the authors of the 1976 Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence were proven correct when the 1975 Cabinet papers were released on New Year's Day 2006.

The evidence from the files released by the National Archives of Australia (some material has been withheld for security and other reasons) reveals the following. First, Whitlam's opposition to accepting asylum seekers from South Vietnam was motivated by a policy not to upset the communist regime in Hanoi. For example, a message from Canberra to the embassy in Hanoi instructed it to advise the North Vietnamese government that Australia "would be very sorry to see the refugee question affect" relations between the two nations.

Hanoi was also to be told that "Australia has not been engaged in mass evacuations from Vietnam; indeed, apart from the special case of the orphans, fewer than 80 Vietnamese were flown out of Vietnam by Australia". In fact, Australia boasted to Hanoi about its hard line on asylum seekers.

Another cable, sent to Australia's embassy in Saigon shortly before the fall of South Vietnam, had an empathetic message: "Locally engaged embassy staff are not to be regarded as endangered by their Australian embassy associations and therefore should not, repeat not, be granted entry to Australia." In other words, the Whitlam government directed its diplomats to deny asylum to South Vietnamese employed at the embassy even if they had a well-founded fear of persecution.

Some of the few South Vietnamese who made it to Australia were required to sign an undertaking as a condition of their entry that they would not engage in political activity in Australia. Again, the prime policy consideration was not to upset the regime from which the asylum seekers were fleeing.

Second, Whitlam did not want anti-communists to settle in Australia, irrespective of whether they were genuine asylum seekers. Here his stance differed from the position he took following the overthrow of Salvador Allende's left-wing government in Chile in 1973. Departmental files reveal that, in 1975, a senior foreign affairs official reminded the government that "the prime minister directed in November 1973, during the right-wing military coup in Santiago, that the Australian embassy should grant diplomatic asylum to all who sought it".

Whitlam's attitude to Asian anti-communists was different. His office file contains a handwritten note (possibly written by Whitlam himself): "Do not accept

that a person claiming to be a refugee ... is entitled to claim residence in Australia. War criminals from Baltic States + Yugoslavia, not from Vietnam". Here Whitlam was running the line that Australia had accepted war criminals from Eastern Europe after 1945 and would not do so again. Yet there was no evidence that any Vietnamese seeking refuge in Australia in 1975 was a war criminal. Whitlam just did not like anti-communists.

Whitlam's case for the defence is published in the March 2003 issue of *The Sydney Institute Quarterly*. However, the files from 1975 prove that the views of his contemporary critics on this issue - including the academic Nancy Viviani, journalist Denis Warner and the members of the bipartisan Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs - were correct. Whitlam did everything possible to prevent Vietnamese asylum seekers from reaching Australia - as Hal Colebatch documents in detail.

## GOUGH WHITLAM'S DENIAL OF CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE

Gough Whitlam's hostility to Indo-Chinese even extended to when he resigned from Parliament after the December 1977 election. In September 1978 Gough Whitlam addressed a seminar at the Australian National University. His speech - titled "Vietnam - Refugees, Border War, Rehabilitation" - was published in Malcolm Salmon (ed) *The Vietnam-Kampuchea-China Conflicts: Motivations, Background, Significance* (March 1979). In this speech Whitlam even queried where the term "refugees" should properly be applied to the situation in Vietnam viz:

**First, the refugees. I looked into this matter in Geneva with the International Committee of the Red Cross and with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I also discussed it in Bangkok, in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, and in Nanning, the capital of Guangxi province, next to Vietnam, and also in Guangzhou. In the European context refugees used to mean at the beginning of the century those who were leaving the Tsarist Empire. Forty years ago they used to mean those who were leaving the German Empire, largely Jews. Thirty years ago they used to mean those who were leaving the new Russian Empire. Nowadays those whom we call refugees may not be so classified in the technical sense under the relevant international conventions. The Jews were free to leave Germany before the outbreak of the Second World War. The people who are leaving Vietnam now in general are free to leave Vietnam. It is arguable whether they are refugees.**

In the same speech, Gough Whitlam effectively denied that atrocities were taking place under the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia:

**I make bold to doubt all the stories that appear in the newspapers about the treatment of people in Cambodia. I am sufficiently hardened to believe that the last refuge of the patriot in Australia is to blast the regimes in post-war Indochina.**

## CONCLUSION - KIM MEREDITH REMEMBERS

On 2 August 2013, *The Australian* published a letter from Kim Meredith (of Rapid Creek, Northern Territory) which provided a first-hand reflection of the Indo-Chinese asylum seekers who settled in Australia during the time of Malcolm Fraser's government:

**Malcolm Fraser's claims about his government's record in managing asylum-seekers are becoming extravagant. I was a frontline health officer in resettlement camps in Southeast Asia during his government. There were only a handful of Vietnamese asylum-seekers who arrived in Australia by boat. This is because the government disabled boats so they could not travel beyond Malaysia or Indonesia. This was undertaken mainly because Australia did not want boats of asylum-seekers, but it was also an attempt to prevent further deaths at sea.**

**Fraser should be well aware of the dangers to asylum-seekers when they travel by sea. The number of Vietnamese who died at sea trying to reach Australia during his period as PM was appalling. A criminal trade in violent piracy developed.**

**During Fraser's government, Australia contributed to the maintenance of several refugee camps in Malaysia and Singapore. The camps were rough settlements with basic infrastructure. Infant mortality was high and there was no personal freedom. Australia's intake of Vietnamese asylum-seekers from these camps during this period was acceptable, but not excessive...**

Kim Meredith's recollections help to diminish much of the mythology which has grown around the Indo-Chinese asylum seekers for four decades and demonstrate the similarities and differences with today's asylum seekers.

By Gerard Henderson



# ARCHBISHOP DANIEL MANNIX, JIM GRIFFIN AND THE AUSTRALIAN DICTIONARY OF BIOGRAPHY

The historian James (Jim) Griffin died on 9 May 2010 aged 80. James Griffin's last book *Daniel Mannix: Beyond the Myths* (Garratt Publishing) has just been released. It was edited for publication by Paul Ormonde, who wrote the final chapter.

Reviewing *Daniel Mannix* for *The Weekend Australian* (13-14 July 2013), Professor Ross Fitzgerald wrote that, before he died, the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne from 1917 to 1963 "burned almost all his few remaining letters and other documents". It is not certain that this is the case – see the correspondence between Gerard Henderson and Brenda Niall in *The Sydney Institute Quarterly* Issues 38 & 39.

In her review of the Mannix biography in *The Age* (27 July 2013), Morag Fraser wrote that "Mannix wilfully destroyed most of the personal papers that might have illuminated his private soul". She provided no evidence in support of this allegation. Certainly Dr Mannix did not keep many files – but some letters and documents survived him. Also, it is not clear that he ever engaged in the kind of personal correspondence which might have illuminated his private soul.

In her review, Morag Fraser commented:

**Mannix, his era and close associates (including B.A. Santamaria and John Wren), consumed Griffin's scholarly energies for decades. Griffin's iconoclastic Mannix entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* sparked fierce reaction when it was published in 1986. It was deemed heresy (Santamaria and George Pell were among its most vehement repudiators), and all the more heinous for coming from an insider - a Catholic historian who, ironically, was one of the beneficiaries of Mannix's promotion of Catholic higher education and Catholic lay action.**

Jim Griffin's entry on Daniel Mannix in Volume 10 of *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* (published in

1986) is controversial and it was criticised by such Mannix supporters as B. A. (Bob) Santamaria and the now Cardinal George Pell. But neither man invoked the “heresy” attack.

In view of the interest in the *ADB* entry on Daniel Mannix, the following correspondence is published between Jim Griffin and Gerard Henderson, which covers the issue. During his final years, Griffin was not well and this was reflected in both his handwriting and his content. The correspondence below has been edited to exclude personal and other matters not related to the *ADB* controversy and to clarify some issues. It gives an insight into how far Jim Griffin viewed his most controversial piece of writing.

**JIM GRIFFIN TO GERARD HENDERSON –  
8 FEBRUARY 2008.**

Dear Gerard

I understand from Di Langmore that some (not unfavourable) mention was made about my Mannix article in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Volume 10 when she talked at your institute. I am sending you a copy of my reply to the Santamaria criticism which when I delivered at the Irish-Australian History Conference in Hobart in July 1995, titled “Daniel Mannix in *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 10 – Revisionism or Reality”. It may interest, perhaps even amuse, you. Hope you read this. I’m still recuperating from some nearly fatal “indispositions”.

Cheers to Anne and yourself  
Jim Griffin

**GERARD HENDERSON TO JIM GRIFFIN –  
2 SEPTEMBER 2008.**

Dear Jim

Many thanks for your letter of 8 February 2008 enclosing a copy of your 1995 paper titled “Daniel Mannix in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 10: Revisionism or Reality?” Apologies for the delay in responding but I have been very busy of late. I had not seen your paper before although I had heard about it. I read it with interest and have placed a copy in my files.

Di Langmore is correct in stating that some attention was given to your *ADB* entry on Daniel Mannix when she addressed The Sydney Institute on 13 November 2007. This occurred during the question/discussion period when the focus was on how the *ADB* commissioned authors and the editorial guidelines under which they wrote.

I was the person who raised the Mannix entry with Di Langmore at the Institute. I admire your essay in

*ADB* as a work of scholarship which demolishes, in whole or in part, some of the Mannix mythology. My criticism turns on the view that it is very much a polemic – albeit a well written and informative one – and it was compiled by a well-known antagonist of Mannix. As you know, you were associated with the *Catholic Worker* – which Mannix opposed from at least the early 1950s until his death in 1963. Commissioning you to write the *ADB* entry on Archbishop Daniel Mannix would not be unlike commissioning, say, B.A. Santamaria to write the *ADB* entry on Cardinal Norman Gilroy. As you know, Santamaria was an antagonist of Gilroy.

I am not aware that the *ADB* has a record of asking one-time participants in the political debate to write about those they opposed – except, of course, your entry on Archbishop Mannix. Having said this I should point out – as I have done previously – that I regard your work on Mannix as informative and that I agree with much of it.

It would be good to catch up again.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely  
Gerard Henderson

PS : I note that there is a handwritten amendment to your typewritten paper concerning Bishop Arthur Fox’s alleged comment of circa 1960 that it would be a mortal sin for Catholics to vote Labor on account of what he regarded as the ALP’s closeness to the Communist Party in Victoria at the time. The reference is to your sentence on Page 8 of your paper where you wrote:

**He [Mannix] used his auxiliary bishop [Fox] to say it was *virtually* a mortal sin for a Catholic to vote for the Labor Party.**

As you are aware, you added the word “virtually” to your typed manuscript. I have never found any evidence that Bishop Fox ever said it would be a mortal sin for Catholics to vote Labor. Your use of the word “virtually” confirms this since the word “virtually” is invariably used to cover a situation which might have occurred but did not, in fact, take place.

**EXTRACT FROM JIM GRIFFIN TO GERARD  
HENDERSON – 13 NOVEMBER 2008**

Dear Gerard

Sorry this has taken so long but I’m in my 80th year. I’m finding even writing difficult, not to mention finding your letter which I’m damned if I can ...

You raised an interesting question re the selection of writers of *ADB*. The application of the working principle to choose, *if possible*, sympathetic scribes for the entries, is a good one and was taken into

consideration by those two admirable scholar-editors, Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle.

But first let me ask you what you would do if you were general editor of the *Dictionary of German Biography*. Who would you choose to biog Goebbels, Goering, the great maniac himself, or even Speer? A relative, an offspring of an associate? No? Or would your criterion be one of fairness rather than sympathy?

Mannix is not, of course, such an extreme case. However, when the editors called for applications, was Santamaria, "the cleverest man Mannix had ever met", the proper person to write about the "most intelligent man Santamaria had ever met", and one who was "more politically astute than Adenauer" (whom Santamaria had never met) etc etc.?

As you would know, there were in the early 80s eight so-called "biogs" or, better, monographs on Mannix. I talked to the *ADB* editors about them and convinced them there was little real scholarship in them. Simple fellows, they saw the point. (Bob Santamaria went apoplectic, I believe). But I assured them that I would not be giving Mannix the full barrel, that I would look for consensus on controversial points so that *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Volume 10 does not just represent my ripest opinions about that irrational hierarch. I have also been led to understand that my entry is rather better "crafted" than some others might do. The text passed several times between the editors and myself for modification or whatever. I will send you copies of a few missives between Serle and myself to give some idea of how we worked. You may note that Serle and others wanted a more polemical conclusion. I opted for something more sentimental - with reason.

I'm also including bibliographical notes I gave out to ANU students when I gave a guest lecture on "Mannix and Conscriptio" there in 1986. Oddly it doesn't seem biased to me. They were sent to and cited by Bob later.

I gather Bob denied having met me. Well, we all knew our mendacious Bob! In the 60s/70s he complained that I had never been to see him, the assumption being that, like so many others, I would succumb to his charming and brilliant conversation. I had no intention of paying court. If he wanted to see me he had only to write. Then in the 80s when I took up the *ADB* project I thought I should "consult" him. So I did.

Two morning sessions and he even gave me a few documents which I still have, of very little use. We had an interesting (for me, at any rate) Italianale tussle. (You may know I spent some time in Italy and adjusted enjoyably to their courteous negotiating-conversational skills). A good ploy is to find first a common butt for criticism such as Arthur Calwell or dopey Colm Kiernan or similar. I thought we got on well. He seemed as

curious as I. How could anyone think such thoughts as I did of him, all bounce and gesticulation and geniality? But you know him well, and may think differently.

Anyway, my dear Gerard, I am now old and frail. I'm trying to finish my biog of Mannix and, if I survive, should do so by Easter. If it is publishable, bon! If I can't do it, I'm happy to consign it to a MS archive for someone else to plumb.

I don't know if your Institute is interested in hearing me on Mannix. You could invite George Pell with blunderbuss. Certainly, you'll get an audience, although I may need to be propped up - a high stool? -

Wishing you and your wife the best cheer for xmas and continued productivity - and critique.

Cheers  
Jim Griffin.

PS. I've just recalled that I asked to write either Nellie Melba or Daniel Mannix for the *ADB*. Jim Davidson grabbed Melba. At a preview seminar, Sir Keith Hancock said he hoped he'd never have to read me on Mannix. At the launch by Hancock, he mentioned all and sundry and carefully left me out. To his generation having a villainous Mannix was as important as having an heroic Mannix to Catholics.

#### GERARD HENDERSON TO JIM GRIFFIN - 20 NOVEMBER 2008

Dear Jim

Thanks for your letter of 13 November 2008. I read your comments and attached documents with much interest.

As previously indicated, I admire much in your *ADB* entry on Daniel Mannix. My only concern is that you were one of DM's antagonists. For the record, I do not believe that B.A. Santamaria should have done the piece - he was too much of a barracker. By the way, I enjoyed your description of meeting BAS - it sounds very plausible to me.

As you will be aware, since the initial controversy about your Mannix entry, Robert Pascoe's book on Monsignor John. F. Kelly has appeared. In *The Feasts & Seasons of John F. Kelly*, Pascoe suggests that Kelly was involved in the "production" of the Mannix *ADB* entry. Once again, Kelly was an antagonist of Mannix.

Two final points:

- I would very much like to have you address The Sydney Institute following the publication of your Mannix biography. By the way, we have made provision before for someone to deliver a talk seated. I do not think that George Pell would be willing to share a platform with you on Mannix - but someone else might be found to present a different view. Let me know when you have a date for publication.

• I would be interested in reading your Xavier College memoirs. For the record, I have always maintained that you were an excellent teacher and I have never heard a contrary view. I gave you a brief mention in my 2008 Sir Robert Menzies Lecture – and have attached a copy of this (see Page 6).

Best wishes

Yours sincerely  
Gerard Henderson

**JIM GRIFFIN TO GERARD HENDERSON –  
3 DECEMBER 2008**

[Note. This letter was forwarded in an unfinished form]

Dear Gerard

Thanks for yours of 20 November 2008..

Firstly, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* on Mannix. You did not answer my question re the *Dictionary of German Biography* - a “reduction ad absurdum” of course, but it makes a point. As I think I said before, scholarship and fairness were the criteria. Myself, Serle and Nairn were not aware anyone better was available. And a point of view can be unavoidable - indeed, should be.

But I deny being an antagonist of Mannix. A critic, yes, a very different thing. Probably the same should be said for Monsignor Kelly. He would hardly have been Director of Catholic Education if he'd been an antagonist. Wrong word. And Pascoe is quite wrong to suggest that Kelly was involved in the “production”. Very much the wrong word.

There was no “production” but rather a *consultation* with an honest, responsible bureaucrat chosen by Mannix - a highly intelligent one as conversant with ecclesiastical lore as any cleric I've known. Who should be consulted? Frank Maher? I have two lengthy letters to prove it which I shall archive eventually, aside from the collegiality and friendship I shared with him for years. And others too numerous to recall - e.g. Gerard Herffey who, after sharing memories, nevertheless said of my “product”: very good, but you missed the *majesty* of the man. (I've been trying to catch it in prose since).

I was not at all clear what Pascoe wanted from me when he came (no doubt, my fault). He took down every garrulous spontaneous word and, of course, checked nothing. I'll leave you to imagine what I think of his slapdash book.

Kelly wrote me some notes on the finished entry. He was doddering by then: they are illegible. I'll see if I can find them. I mean that I'm not sure precisely what he said in the end except that he liked the Mannix entry.

As I pointed out in my Hobart 1995 paper, “Revisionism or Reality?”, which I think you've seen, I said lots of pleasant things about Mannix in the *ADB* some of which I would modify but it's necessary to keep an eye on consensus in the *ADB* where idiosyncrasy is not wanted.

If the good Di Langmore thinks that entries have to be sympathetic rather than empathetic she is not in line with her admirable predecessors, Douglas Pike, Geoffrey Serle and Bede Nairn, scholars of a different order (cf their books)...

**GERARD HENDERSON TO JIM GRIFFIN –  
20 JANUARY 2009**

Dear Jim

Thank you for forwarding your unfinished note dated 3 December 2008 to me. I am sorry to hear that you are unwell but, in spite of this, you still write an interesting letter..

You are correct that I did not answer your hypothetical question on the *Dictionary of German Biography*. In fact, I always avoid comparisons between democratic societies and totalitarian regimes. So, in my view, there is no point in discussing a biographical essay on an Adolf Hitler and on a Daniel Mannix in the same breath.

I believe that someone like Patrick O'Farrell would have been well placed to do the Mannix entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. He was not directly involved in the dispute within the Catholic Church in the 1950s and 1960s and was neither an antagonist of, nor a protagonist for, Mannix. In my view, members and supporters of the *Catholic Worker* were antagonists of Mannix – because they had attacked his political involvements and he had effectively banned the *CW* from being sold outside Catholic churches.

I was interested in your material on Monsignor John Kelly and his comments on Mannix (even though they are difficult to read at times). I look forward to reading your Mannix biography. It will be an important book. It is true that most of the existing works on Mannix are either very supportive or hagiography – so it will be good to have some balance on the book shelves....

I would very much like you to address The Sydney Institute on your Mannix manuscript in due course. As advised, you would be able to give such a paper seated if this were necessary.

Best wishes. Regards to Helga.

Gerard Henderson



GERARD HENDERSON'S  
**MEDIA WATCH**  
 - INCORPORATING  
**SANDALISTA WATCH**

**A LEFTIST SANDAL-WEARING STACK  
 AS LEFTISTS ASSESS GOUGH  
 WHITLAM IN THE ABC'S  
 CONSERVATIVE-FREE-ZONE**

In his 1937 book *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell defended “the ordinary decent person” against “the intellectual, book-trained socialist”. He wrote that the latter:

“... type is drawn, to begin with, entirely from the middle class, and from a rootless town-bred section of that middle class at that. ...It includes...the foaming denouncers of the bourgeoisie, and the more-water-in-your-beer reformers of whom [George Bernard] Shaw is the prototype, and the astute young social-literary climbers...and all that dreary tribe of high-minded women and sandal-wearers and bearded fruit-juice drinkers who come flocking towards the smell of ‘progress’ like bluebottles to a dead cat.”

The ABC advertised *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* – written and directed by Paul Clarke with Whitlam biographer Jenny Hocking as historical script consultant – as the “definitive” documentary on Gough Whitlam, the Labor prime minister from his election in December 1972 until his dismissal by Governor-General Sir John Kerr on 11 November 1975. *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* was signed off by Phil Craig in his capacity as ABC Head of Factual. Mr Craig has said that he is “really proud of the Whitlam series”. “Sandalista Watch” examines this “definitive” documentary and refers to Mr Craig’s defence of the program, in correspondence, which was published in Gerard Henderson’s *Media Watch Dog* blog, Issue 193, on 2 August 2013.



Ever doubted that the taxpayer funded public broadcaster is a Conservative-Free-Zone? Well any doubt would have been assuaged by watching *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* which was presented by the ABC as the definitive documentary on Gough Whitlam and the Whitlam Labor government. The documentary aired on 26 May 2013 and 2 June 2013.

In a documentary on Gough Whitlam, it is to be expected that a number of Whitlam’s colleagues – parliamentarians, Labor staffers and party functionaries – would be interviewed. And so it came to pass that the likes of Barry Cohen, Barry Jones, Bill Hayden, Bob Carr, Bob Hawke, staffer Carol Summerhays, David Combe, staffer Elizabeth Cham, staffer Elizabeth Reid, staffer Eric Walsh, staffer and speech writer Graham Freudenberg, staffer and public servant John Menadue, staffer Junie Morosi, Kep Enderby, Les Johnson, Moss Cass, Race Matthews and Tom Uren would have their say. Fair enough.

Also, in a documentary which covered the Whitlam government, it would be expected to hear briefly from some leading Coalition politicians – to give a flavour of the political contest. This explains the interviews with the Liberal Party’s Malcolm Fraser and John Howard along with the National Party’s Ian Sinclair – all of whom made contributions to the program – with that of Howard the most substantial and that of Fraser the least plausible. Again, fair enough.

However, Paul Clarke’s decision to interview only leftist or left-of-centre commentators is evidence of yet another leftist stack in what has become a Conservative-Free-Zone. When John Moore’s documentary *Menzies & Churchill at War* aired on the ABC in October 2008, the views of left-wing commentators critical of Menzies were heard. Namely, the labour historian Dr David Day and the one-time editor of the Marxist *Arena Journal* Dr Judith Brett. Gerard Henderson was interviewed for

the documentary but his views were censored and did not go to air. His position was not consistent with John Moore's critique of Menzies' position during the early years of the Second World War.

Also, there was no room for conservative commentators – as distinct from the Labor Party operatives – in *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion*. It was wall-to-wall luvvies who lined up to comment on Gough Whitlam. A veritable parade of Sandalistas. Here they are. Step forward Andrew Denton (who was just 12 years old when Whitlam was elected prime minister), actor Anne Phelan, academic Dr David Peetz (who worked for Whitlam at the Australian National University after he left politics), George Negus, Jane Caro (who was aged 15 years when Whitlam was elected prime minister), comedian Jean Kittson (who is married to Peter Cook), John Nicolades (who was a first year university student at the ANU in 1975), comedian Max Gilles, commentator Mungo MacCallum, indigenous activist Pat Turner, comedian Patrick Cook (who is married to Jean Kittson), hotelier Susie Carleton and – of course – Phillip Adams, the ABC's "Man-in-Black" and house-leftist.

Only two non-leftist commentators were heard in the two-part documentary. Namely, Professor James Curran (who made a number of empirical comments on Australian foreign policy that were generally positive about Whitlam) and Geoff Didlier (who, as a student in 1975, laughed at the Dismissal but soon came to regret his folly, demonstrating that those who laughed at Whitlam can achieve forgiveness in later life). That's all. Not one conservative commentator was heard on the documentary criticising Gough Whitlam or the Whitlam government.

It is true that some of the leftist commentators criticised aspects of Mr Whitlam and/or the Whitlam government. But only from a left-wing perspective. The view of Coalition voters, who comprised around half of the Australian adult population at the time, was not heard in the documentary. Except, of course, as expected comments from Coalition parliamentarians at the time. This did not provide balance – since viewers would expect that Messers Fraser, Howard and Sinclair would criticise the Whitlam government to a greater or lesser extent.

"Sandalista Watch" highlights some of the contributions by luvvies – and some others – in the "definitive" documentary which was narrated by acclaimed actor – and Sandalista – Judy Davis. Ms Davis' comments state the views of the writer Paul Clarke as checked by Dr Jenny Hocking – author of a

two part hagiography on Gough Whitlam which was supported by generous taxpayer funded grants from the Australian Research Council.

In a statement which he wrote for the ABC, Clarke, who was a teenager in the 1970s, admitted that he "didn't know as much about Gough Whitlam as many people" when he commenced the project. Yet Paul Clarke was regarded by the ABC as suitable to write and direct a "definitive" documentary on the subject.

## **EPISODE 1: 1950-1972**

*Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* commences with Judy Davis emoting about Gough Whitlam as a great leader:

**He was a figure like we'd never seen before. An agent of change. An Orpheus in a bogan underworld. His name generated great emotion.**

Get it? Apart from Gough Whitlam and his supporters, Australians were all "bogans" then – while your man Whitlam was a (Greek) legend like your man Orpheus. Then, one by one, Sandalistas pronounced their praise for the Great Man. "Liberation" – Anne Phelan. "Oh, I was elated" – Pat Turner. "This was pretty heady stuff" – the normally cynical Mungo MacCallum. "It was like a technicolour person had walked out of a black and white movie." – Andrew Denton's (school days) assessment. Jane Caro was depicted expressing her anger, born of the disappointment that the Whitlam government was scandal-laden. However, Caro had no criticism of what Gough Whitlam referred to as "the platform" – just that he did not fulfil it in an efficient, scandal-free manner.

Soon Graham Freudenberg appears on the screen with the following assessment:

**Well three things he took from his father: a devotion to the public service, an absolute rejection of racial intolerance and third, an internationalism. I think those were the three things that he just absorbed.**

No other view was heard on Gough Whitlam's alleged "rejection of racial intolerance". So viewers of the documentary were not told of Whitlam's description of Indo-Chinese refugees in 1975 as "fucking Vietnamese Balts" – meaning anti-communists. There is no report of any other Australian prime minister making such a racially intolerant statement against an ethnic minority. Yet viewers were told that Whitlam was free of racial intolerance. Imagine if John Howard had told the Cabinet, circa 2001, that he was not going to have

“f-ucking Afghan Muslims” coming to Australia? He would have been condemned by a bevy of luvvies alleging racial intolerance.

This is how Phil Craig defended Graham Freudenberg’s unchallenged assertion:

**In my view, this has less to do with fact checking than “matter of opinion”. Freudenberg’s remark is a part of the matrix of subjective impressions and anecdotes that make up any biography, literary or otherwise. And he is well placed to deliver his opinion. Admittedly, through the process of editing, we have selected to highlight his view of Whitlam’s father, but it is not an unusual view.**

**And even if Whitlam was later prone - under pressure - to bursts of language such as “fuc\*ing Vietnamese” it does not negate the statement that he absorbed lessons from his father’s life, or that his father set standards he sought to match. It would seem strange to me in a television documentary to follow up a quote like this with a heavy handed qualifying line of narration effectively saying “ah yes but x years later he was reported saying y”.**

**This statement [by Freudenberg] is an observation, by someone who knew Whitlam very well. Documentaries such as this depend on observations to give insight into what drives a character. It is true that Whitlam remarked that people who escaped Communist regimes tended to vote for right wing parties. Clyde Cameron’s anecdote, therefore, could be the result of a snappy moment of political resentment rather than racial intolerance.**

This is nothing but a rationalisation. There is no evidence that Whitlam was under pressure in April 1975 when he condemned Vietnamese refugees. Also, there is no evidence that Whitlam ever changed his position on Vietnamese refugees – he was never sympathetic to them. Moreover, it’s not the role of the ABC Head of Factual to assume the motives of others or to theorise about why Clyde Cameron wrote what he did in his book *China, Communism and Coca-Cola*.

Now it’s time for some leftist alienation - as Judy Davis preaches:

**In 1960, Australia was asleep at the wheel. We were in a post-war dreamtime of**

**suburban houses, backyards, beaches and dream machines. Just past the suburbs, a fluffy army of a hundred million merinos paid for everything.**

This is a significant exaggeration. In 1960, despite problems, Australia was a relatively vibrant society based on a relatively strong economy. Rural exports played an important role in the economy – but no more than that. Moreover, many Australians liked suburban houses, backyards and beaches. It was the time thousands of migrants sought – and obtained – entry to Australia impressed by the very lifestyle that Paul Clarke (speaking through his narrator) mocks.

Now George Negus appears on the documentary. He is described as a reporter for the ABC TV program *This Day Tonight* between 1967 and 1971. Well, so he was. But the documentary makes no mention of the fact that George Negus was press secretary to the erratic Senator Lionel Murphy, one of the key left-wing influences in the Whitlam Labor Cabinet. Murphy is much loved by the luvvies – and the subject of a sympathetic taxpayer subsidised biography by, you’ve guessed it, Jenny Hocking. In other words, Negus was a Whitlam activist. The “super” describing Negus’ role at the time is seriously misleading. Negus also threw the switch to alienation:

**It was a totally different Australia. It was tranquil, which was pretty close to subservient if you ask me. You did as you were told by your parents, by your teacher, your football coach, or the Prime Minister.**

This is light-weight nonsense. Australian political life in the 1950s and 1960s was anything but tranquil. Moreover, the suggestion that Australians did what they were told by Prime Minister Robert Menzies is pure hyperbole. Menzies went close to losing elections in 1954 and 1961 – on the latter occasion the Coalition government was saved by the preferences of the Democratic Labor Party, which was a product of the Labor Split of 1955-1957. If Australians did as they were told by Menzies, Labor would not have got around 50 per cent of the vote on either occasion.

In the December 1972 election, it is estimated by Malcolm Mackerras that, after preferences, Labor received 52.7 percent of the vote. In other words, the Coalition – led by the unappealing William McMahon – received 47.3 per cent of the vote. Yet Mungo MacCallum told *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* that no rational person voted for McMahon – which means that, in MacCallum’s view, nearly half the adult

population in 1972 was not rational. This is what MacCallum had to say:

**There was certainly a belief that it was time for a change and there was no rational person [who] could really vote to keep Billy McMahon on as prime minister. And when you contrasted the “It’s Time” t-shirts that the Labor people were wearing, with the best the Liberals could come up with was one saying: “Oh not yet”. I mean, this really pointed out the difference between the two parties and the two attitudes.**

The fact is that, in 1972, there were a number of rational Australians who could identify Gough Whitlam’s personal weaknesses in advance of his assuming the prime ministership and who expressed concern about his competence to manage the economy at a time when there were signs of an economic downturn. Mungo MacCallum, Sandalista, did not hold this view. But some others did – who were not heard on *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion*. Their assessment of Whitlam’s flaws turned out to be correct.

Jane Caro, who was aged 15 in December 1972, spoke to *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* without seeming to realise that many Australians did not share her love affair with Gough Whitlam. Then or now. Yet, according to Ms Caro, “everyone” was thrilled at Whitlam’s victory:

**They [Labor] won, and it was euphoric, and it was fantastic, and everyone was thrilled and we all thought Australia was going to move into the 20th Century at long last.**

Yet more hyperbole – of the Sandalista kind. Many Australians were thrilled at Labor’s victory in 1972 – and many were disappointed. Caro projected her (teenage) views on to Australian society as a whole. In 1972, Australia was very much in the 20th Century – which is why so many migrants sought entry.

Mungo MacCallum added to the mythology – this time commenting on the two person ministry of Gough Whitlam and his deputy Lance Barnard which was set up immediately after the 1972 election pending election of the full ministry by the Labor Caucus:

**And it was very exciting. I mean, it was quite crazy. Every morning, the paper came out with virtually half the front page devoted to what the government did yesterday. You know, after years in which**

**the government had appeared to do absolutely nothing, this was pretty heady stuff.**

Yet more hyperbole. The idea that the governments headed by Robert Menzies, Harold Holt, John Gorton and William McMahon did “absolutely nothing” is mere left-wing barracking. At the end of Episode 1, Bill Hayden (who was a member of the Whitlam Cabinet) spoke about his early concern about Whitlam’s arrogance. Hayden’s position was sound. Yet, in a sense, he was Whitlam’s rival – and challenged Whitlam for the Labor leadership in 1977. No seemingly independent commentator made a similar assessment. This reflected the fact that no political conservative was heard throughout Episode 1 of the taxpayer subsidised *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion*.

Also, as Labor historian Troy Bramston commented when reviewing the documentary for *The Australian* on 20 May 2013, “the important changes made under Liberal prime ministers Harold Holt, John Gorton and Billy McMahon are ignored” in the documentary. This is a documentary which saw Australia through Gough Whitlam – for better or for worse.

## **EPISODE 2: 1972-1980**

Judy Davis commenced Episode 2 with the following refrain re Gough Whitlam:

**Now he was our leader and the hippies were suddenly the government. The tectonic plates of our nation were shifting. Gough Whitlam was about to change Australia forever... By electing the Whitlam government, we had signed up for a huge social experiment. At the heart of it was the program, the plans Whitlam had spent twenty years drafting.... It was a blueprint for massive social change.**

The claim that, in December 1972, hippies came to government in Australia is hyperbole which has no place in what is supposed to be a definitive documentary.

Also, the documentary overlooked the fact that Australia was a divided society in the early 1970s. Gough Whitlam had a mandate to govern but he did not have a blueprint for social change which was endorsed by all Australians. This became manifestly evident at the December 1975 double dissolution election where the Whitlam experiment ended in devastating defeat. Judy Davis’ subsequent claim that the “journey” of Gough Whitlam and his wife Margaret became “ours” is yet more hyperbole.

Margaret Whitlam was a controversial prime ministerial spouse – much admired and much criticised. But you would never get to know this from viewing *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion*.

According to Judy Davis:

**The Whitlams were a progressive family and Margaret was like no one we'd ever seen in the Lodge before.**

This is yet more Sandalista adulation of the Whitlams. Sure, Margaret Whitlam was a modern woman. But so was Zara Holt and Bettina Gorton and Sonia McMahon.

The narrator continued:

**Women's rights became the first battleground to modernise the nation. Whitlam appointed the first adviser on women's affairs to a head of state anywhere in the world, a thirty year old single mother named Elizabeth Reid. It shocked both sides of politics.**

Elizabeth Reid was appointed adviser to Gough Whitlam – Australia's head of government. Australia's head of state is Queen Elizabeth II who, in 1973, was represented in Australia by the Governor-General, Sir Paul Hasluck. Phil Craig will not even concede that this is an error – maintaining that providing Whitlam's proper title "would have spoiled the moment". This from the ABC Head of Factual. By the way, the howler resulted from someone taking the description of Elizabeth Reid's position from the National Library of Australia website without fact-checking.

This is how Phil Craig defended the ABC documentary's claim that in 1973 Gough Whitlam was Australia's head of state:

**I may have misjudged this, but here is my reasoning: Firstly this is a film that opens with a line describing Whitlam as "an Orpheus in a bogan underworld" and so right from the start it is clearly embracing a lyrical, colourful style of narration. Again, this should never be an excuse for inaccuracy or misleading the viewers, but when I accepted the Orpheus line I did not expect anyone to ask me "Phil, have you carefully fact checked the ABC's claim that 1970s Australia was populated by the dead, where is the empirical evidence to support this claim?" What I expected is that people would understand that this documentary has a free writing style.**

**Now, of course, implying that Whitlam was Head of State is different to a tongue-in-cheek remark about Orpheus. But do we really say that he was Head of State? I don't think we do. What mattered to me here was the impact of the comparison. And the comparison we're making is between a forward thinking Australia and the most powerful *elected* leaders in the rest of the world, such as the Heads of State of the USA and various European nations.**

**We're saying that no other country had done what Whitlam did, a remark that has real impact. Changing the line to add in a sub clause or two explaining that Whitlam was a head of a government rather than a head of state (like an American President) would have spoiled the moment in my judgment. And I then further reasoned that since Whitlam served on behalf and in the name of the real head of state then there was no harm in making this punchy comparison.**

**I'd still argue that this was a victimless crime, but on reflection and prompted by your criticism I concede that it may have been a mistake. Whether it rises to the level of "fundamental error" I leave others to judge, and I don't think it misleads anyone. It's a powerful statement of a note-worthy comparison.**

So there you have it – an almost incoherent defence. *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* is "definitive". But it's also "lyrical". And saying that Whitlam was "an Orpheus" is just like saying that he was Australia's head of state.

Now the sentiment in *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* increases apace – as is evident in the contributions by Patrick Cook and Jane Caro:

**Judy Davis:** Press loved him. He was genuine and he was playful.

**Gough Whitlam:** Which channel?

**Reporter:** Channels Nine, Seven, and the 10 Network.

**Gough Whitlam:** Where's the ABC? Where's the people's medium?

**Patrick Cook:** Gough appeared to actually like us. He might have been a little lofty in places, he might have thought we weren't as smart as he was but that didn't matter.

He radiated a sort of genuine affection for the people in the electorate.

**Judy Davis:** As he became our leader, young Australians like Jane Caro were confident, open to change, keen to see who we would become as a nation.

**Jane Caro:** And I think Gough Whitlam's attitude to doing things differently from the Americans, doing things differently from the British, was part of that whole feeling of: "What do we think? What do we stand for? What do we like to listen to? What do we want to watch? What are our stories?"

According to Andrew Denton (aged 12 in early 1973):

**The Labor government seemed to be a mixture of hippies and SP bookies. So you had Al Grassby, obviously, and Moss Cass and Jim Cairns. And, on the SP bookies side, you had people like Rex Connor. You know, just people who you just weren't too sure about.**

So there you have it. Hippies versus SP Bookies. And this in a definitive documentary. Moreover, the idea that Al Grassby, the immigration minister in the first Whitlam government, was a mere hippie overlooks his subsequent involvement in drug related crime.

It's time to hear from Phillip Adams again.

**Phillip Adams:** When he [Whitlam] had his first fully fledged cabinet meeting, John Button swears this event took place. Whitlam sits at the head of the table, all the shiny brand new ministers are lined up left and right, mainly left. And he's looking at them all, and you'll have to bleep this because he looked at them all and said: "None of you cunts (bleeped) matter."

This may, or may not have happened – there is a similar story about a meeting of State Labor leaders at Kirribilli House in early 1976. But the documentary should have stated that John Button was not a member of the Whitlam ministry at any time. So, at best, this is hearsay.

In March 1973, accompanied by his press secretary George Negus, Attorney-General Lionel Murphy decided to raid the ASIO headquarters in Melbourne. Mungo MacCallum relates the story:

**That was the result of a long, late night drinking session after which Lionel**

**decided, you know, yes, he would commandeer a plane and go to Melbourne and bust into ASIO.**

For the record, there is no evidence that Murphy was under the influence of alcohol when he made the unwise decision to raid the ASIO headquarters in Melbourne in March 1973 – no such reference appears in Jenny Hocking's *Lionel Murphy: A Political Biography*. Moreover, Murphy did not "commandeer a plane" – he flew on the government owned TAA airline.

Judy Davis turns attention to the Liberal Party:

**They'd spent 23 years resisting change, maintaining a white Australia beholden to God and queen.**

In fact, Harold Holt abandoned the White Australia Policy in March 1966. And Australia was never beholden to God or the Queen. This is how Phil Craig defended this claim:

**The God remark you quote above is simply another example of lyrical writing, and not something I'd expect to fact check. You either like this style or you don't.**

**There are competing accounts of when the White Australia policy was definitely "dumped". What we are doing here is using a turn of phrase to sum up a pre Whitlam era where religion, devotion to the Monarchy and a reluctance to accept non white immigrants were defining features. Does anyone seriously doubt that? If this was a documentary about the White Australia policy it would probably have stated that it was under pressure from the late 1950s because of the growing power of the United Nations and the impact of the declaration of human rights. Whitlam was part of a generation of politicians who clearly articulated that the time had come to move on from defining Australia in racial terms.**

So what was presented as a "definitive" documentary is now defended against criticism of how it presented history – since, after all, *Whitlam: The Power and the Passion* is constructed from "lyrical writing". The fact that the first two political parties to oppose the White Australia Party were the anti-communist Democratic Labor Party (which was influenced by the Catholic activist B.A. Santamaria) and the Communist Party of Australia. Neither Whitlam nor Labor was a trail-blazer in advocating the end of the White Australia Policy – contrary to the implication in the documentary.

Mungo MacCallum and Max Gilles, both long-time critics of Sir John Kerr, are asked to comment on Kerr's appointment as Governor-General:

**Mungo McCallum:** He [Kerr] was considered untrustworthy, he was considered a bit of a shonk. It was thought that he hit the bottle far too much. There was a feeling that he was too full of himself, that he couldn't be trusted.

**Max Gilles:** Kerr's self-important grandiosity, the silver wig and the top hat and the clearly working class background. They were unresolvable contradictions, which he was only able to resolve himself with alcohol.

There is a certain irony in Mungo MacCallum accusing others of hitting the bottle. In an interview with the *Good Weekend*, published on 12 February 2005, MacCallum's partner Jenny Garrett blamed John Howard for Mungo's excessive drinking. Believe it or not. Contrary to Gilles' claim, there is no evidence that Kerr wore a silver wig. It seems that the actor Gilles confused the stage-prop which he used to imitate Kerr with the one-time Governor-General's mane.

As the economy collapses, Jane Caro returns to the documentary front:

**The Whitlam government was extremely good at ideals, it was extremely good even at policy, but it was really bad at politics. And I got angrier and angrier about it. I kept thinking: "Can you please just do your job?"**

When Gough Whitlam lost control of the economy in 1974, Ms Caro was still at secondary school. No qualified economist was interviewed on the program.

Jane Caro's (uncontested) view overlooks the fact that the Whitlam government was not "extremely good" at policy. In fact, many Labor minister's – including Gough Whitlam himself, Jim Cairns, Clyde Cameron and Rex Connor were disastrous economic managers.

Then Phillip Adams throws the switch to hearsay:

**Gough loves naughty stories. And Gough was particularly thrilled by a story which had Jim [Cairns] and Junie [Morosi] staying at Kirribilli House as acting prime minister and staffer when they were seen cavorting naked on the lawns. Now the lawns at Kirribilli House are extremely perpendicular. You couldn't – I don't know**

**how they mow the damned things. It's more like trying to mow Mount Everest. But apparently Jim and Junie were romping up and down these grassy dunes. And Gough, to this day, is paralytic when retelling the story. It's the one thing about Jim's career in politics that Gough really likes.**

There is no evidence that this event – which was re-enacted by two young actors in *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* – ever happened. Jim Cairns was 60 at the time – and Junie Morosi was 41. Due to his advancing years, Mr Whitlam's powers have been fading for some time and he is in no condition to tell such a story. Adams first revealed the Cairns/Morosi romp in his 2010 book *Backstage Politics: Fifty years of political memories* when Whitlam was over 90 years of age. It is based on hearsay upon hearsay upon hearsay – and, as such, has no place in what purports to be a definitive documentary.

Nevertheless Phil Craig has defended the depiction of an event which may never have happened as follows:

**There was much reporting of this incident in the newspapers at the time, and subsequently, and Ms Morosi herself was happy with the program, indeed she was grateful to us for representing her point of view. I think the re-enactment dovetails nicely with the evident pleasure Adams takes in telling it, and his account of how Whitlam himself enjoys the story.**

As Phillip Adams' reveals in his political memoirs, he did not get the story direct from Whitlam. Moreover, there is no direct evidence that "Whitlam himself enjoys the story".

Malcolm Fraser told *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* about how he rattled Gough Whitlam:

**I found out at one point that he [Whitlam] liked being photographed on one side rather than the other. I'd learnt that, I would get to the station just two or three minutes too early, and I'd sit on the side that I knew they'd set up for Gough.**

Malcolm Fraser has acknowledged that he has a "notoriously fallible" memory. In fact, there were no Fraser/Whitlam debates in the lead-up to the 1975 election. This seems to be another example of where Fraser has a clear "memory" of an event which never happened. But it was good enough for the ABC's "definitive documentary".

Needless to say, the only commentators who discuss the Dismissal of 11 November 1975 are left-of-centre types who regard the event as a coup. This is comedian Jean Kittson's recollection – she lived in Melbourne at the time:

**We heard about it and we immediately gathered in Bourke Street, the top of Bourke Street. And then very soon, the mob started chanting "Hang Fraser", and then "Kill Fraser", and then everyone starts chanting "Hang Fraser, Hang". And I'm going, "well ..." Then we were going down St. Kilda Road where there's the American Embassy, and suddenly there's rocks flying over my shoulder from someone behind me, starting to smash the glass windows of these buildings. And it's just – from then it just turned into something really, really unpleasant. A mob.**

This event almost certainly never happened. There is no evidence of anti-US demonstrations outside the American Embassy (which is in Canberra, not Melbourne) or an American Consulate (in various Australian cities) on 11 November 1975. It seems that Jean Kittson conflated the anti-US demonstrations (which occurred outside some US diplomatic offices in Australia during the Vietnam War) with the anti-Kerr and anti-Fraser demonstrations (which took place some years later – away from US diplomatic posts). But Phil Craig is willing to defend this claim as well. This is what he had to say:

**I see no reason to question an interviewee's memory of what happened inside a crowd 40 years ago. She talks of stones being thrown and the mood turning ugly and that is her version of events. This series is made up of personal memories and experiences. In our view we were painting a portrait of an individual and a period in Australian history. Memory, interpretation, individual reactions and personal anecdotes and are all essential ingredients.**

**If you believe that the difference between an "embassy" and a "consulate" in someone's story of a demonstration that took place four decades ago is important, then so be it. It's a little like demanding absolute technical accuracy around the use of a term such as "head of state". In both instances the fundamental meaning and the point is clear and there's no intention to mislead.**

**As I say above, you have made me think twice about the Head of State line. Maybe that needed an extra qualifying phrase, or maybe I should have dropped it. But I say to you that your focus on technical, semantic and peripheral points does not, in my view, detract from the overall success of this series.**

Fancy that. The ABC Head of Factual maintains that it is not necessary to fact-check comedian Jean Kittson's recollection of an event which she alleges took place four decades ago. This despite the fact that there is no supporting evidence to uphold the veracity of her memory. Any memory of Gough Whitlam will do apparently, irrespective of whether it is reliable or confused.

## TEARING-UP FOR GOUGH

*Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* wound up with much sentiment and a few tear-ups.

**Judy Davis: But as time passed a legend began to grow. Gough went to work at the ANU, bored out of his mind. A strange thing happened. People from all over Australia began to write to him.**

**David Peetz [tearing up]: When I was working for him, I'd deal with his correspondence, and I'd pass on the stuff that he needed to see. But the thing that I really noticed in reading the correspondence was how many people wrote to him and said: "You gave me the chance to have an education that I wouldn't have otherwise had". And that's something you could feel the emotion in the letters.**

**Judy Davis: Whitlam had come to change us, and he succeeded. He had survived his cataclysmic time. He never lost his vision, and Australia had finally opened its eyes.**

**Phillip Adams: Whitlam will come out as the greatest visionary.**

**Mungo MacCallum [tearing up]: I always regarded Gough as the only politician worth dying for....**

**Andrew Denton [tearing up]: I think Whitlam will be remembered as a great, but flawed, man...But beyond question, historically, there's before Whitlam and after Whitlam. And you can't say that of many politicians.**

This is how Phil Craig defended the fact that only left-of-centre commentators were given a voice on *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* – including the thought of some of the Sandalistas who teared-up when discussing the man who liked to be called “Leader”.

**With respect, I think you're wrong about this. From the outset we worked hard to make sure this series was impeccably fair minded and balanced. If anything, especially in the second programme, we made a determined effort to draw attention to Whitlam's personal and political failings, revealing character traits that made him a great campaigner but a less than effective PM. In a series about a Labor politician it's surely no surprise to find a majority of left-leaning interviewees. But listen to what they are saying. It's by no means always complimentary, and sometimes it is damning.**

We interviewed a handful of comedians who were young at the time because they tend to deliver incisive and entertaining comments. I don't feel any need to apologise for that. There is a sentimental, teary, moment or two at the end, that's true. And I thought long and hard about it. Given that we had comprehensively laid bare Whitlam's failings I thought it was allowable. I was partly influenced by the fact that many people – and by no means only his natural *allies* – do indeed feel sentimental about Gough. That's partly a consequence of his age but I think it's also because even his old enemies accept that some of the changes he made to Australia were important and necessary. After a rather downbeat episode, therefore, I thought it was nice to end on an “up”. Many commentators were critical of the Whitlam government. And several of our interviewees clearly welcomed its demise.

## A SANDALISTA TREAT

The truth is that *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* was a treat for the Gough Whitlam Fan Club. As actor Graeme Blundell concluded his review in *The Weekend Australian* on 18-19 May 2013:

**I loved it, and I loved Gough; I laughed out loud as I watched and cried too, just as I did then. I was there and that's how I remember it. As Midnight Oil's song concludes: “It's better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.”**

Pre-Whitlam Australia was depicted as being repressive. Then along came Whitlam who, despite some faults and failures, inspired a generation. Pre-Whitlam Australia was not an adult country. Post-Whitlam Australia had changed and was part of the world.

Gough Whitlam was much praised by Andrew Denton and others for abolishing university fees. Paul Clarke seems unaware that tertiary fees were restored by Bob Hawke's Labor government because free university education had primarily benefited the better-off and their children – like Andrew Denton.

In his statement on *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion*, Paul Clarke wrote:

**Whitlam's era has been whitewashed in many ways. The Labor Party turned to Bob Hawke as their champion. Yet he didn't change Australia as Whitlam did. We wanted to find out why.**

In fact Bob Hawke, with the support of Paul Keating, commenced the economic reform process which has led to Australia having one of the best performing economies in the Western world – with rising living standards for virtually all Australians. Gough Whitlam's attempts at change led to chaos, recession and falling living standards as unemployment increased.

Yet to Paul Clarke and the Whitlam *The Power & The Passion* team, Gough Whitlam was the visionary. This is music to the ears of the Sandalista set – many of whom are in receipt of government sourced income or payments. But most Australians prefer relative prosperity to passion.

*Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* was in no sense definitive. It was not even good history. Certainly television history requires compassion. It's just that this can be done without error and distortion. Also compassion is not incompatible with diversity. That's why *Whitlam: The Power & The Passion* would have been improved if the voices of some conservative commentators were heard – not just the “progressive” beliefs of the Sandalista set.



# THE SYDNEY INSTITUTE FORTHCOMING FUNCTIONS

**PLEASE NOTE IT IS ESSENTIAL TO RSVP FOR FUNCTIONS no earlier than 2 weeks prior - NB DATES AND VENUES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. PLEASE ASK WHEN BOOKING, OR GO TO**

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- SPEAKER:** **BRAD ORGILL** (former investment banker & author *Why Labor should Savour its Greens*) & **CASSANDRA WILKINSON** (Columnist, *The Australian*, broadcaster and author)  
**DATE:** Tuesday 13 August 2013 *Bookings from 31 July only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **The Greens and Labor – Allies or Enemies?**  
**VENUE:** King & Wood Mallesons, Level 61, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney
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- SPEAKER:** **MICHAEL SINGH** (Managing Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy)  
**DATE:** Monday 19 August 2013 *Bookings from 5 August only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **Iran, Red Lines and Other Threats**  
**VENUE:** The Sydney Institute, 41 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000 **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**
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- SPEAKER:** **DIANA WYNNDHAM** (Author, *Norman Haire and the Study of Sex*)  
**DATE:** Wednesday 21 August 2013 *Bookings from 7 August only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **Norman Haire – Studying Sex in the Early 20th Century**  
**VENUE:** The Sydney Institute, 41 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000 **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**
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- SPEAKER:** **DANIEL PIPES** (President, Middle East Forum, Philadelphia)  
**DATE:** Wednesday 28 August 2013 *Bookings from 7 August only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **The Middle East in Upheaval: Interpreting and Predicting**  
**VENUE:** The Sydney Institute, 41 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000 **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**
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- SPEAKER:** **KELLY O'DWYER MP** (Federal Member for Higgins) & **THE HON ED HUSIC MP** (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister & Parliamentary Secretary for Broadband)  
**DATE:** Monday 2 September 2013 *Bookings from 15 August only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **Australia in the next decade – A Gen X Point of View**  
**VENUE:** Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Level 32, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney
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- SPEAKER:** **ROWAN CALLICK** (editor, *Australian* & author *Party Time – Who Runs China and How?*)  
**DATE:** Wednesday 4 September 2013 *Bookings from 20 Aug only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **Who Runs China and How?**  
**VENUE:** Clayton Utz Seminar Room, Level 13, 1 Bligh Street, Sydney 2000  
**...This function will be hosted jointly with the Asia Society...**
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- SPEAKER:** **DR IAN HANCOCK** (Historian & biographer, most recently *Nick Greiner: A Political Biography*)  
**DATE:** Tuesday 10 September 2013 *Bookings from 28 August only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **Nick Greiner – A Political Life**  
**VENUE:** The Sydney Institute, 41 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000 **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**
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- SPEAKER:** **ELIZABETH BRODERICK** (Sex Discrimination Commissioner)  
**DATE:** Tuesday 17 September 2013 *Bookings from 3 Sep only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **Women in The Australian Defence Force**  
**VENUE:** tba
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- SPEAKER:** **THE HON TIM FISCHER** (former Deputy PM & author, *Holy See, Unholy Me*)  
**DATE:** Thursday 26 September 2013 *Bookings from 12 Sep only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **An Australian at the Holy See**  
**VENUE:** The Gallipoli Club, 12 Loftus St, Sydney NSW 2000 **BAR OPENS AT 5 PM - LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**
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- SPEAKER:** **DR MICHAEL FULLILOVE** (Executive Director, Lowy Institute & author *Rendezvous with Destiny*)  
**DATE:** Wednesday 15 October 2013 *Bookings from 1 October only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**TOPIC:** **Franklin D Roosevelt and America's European Pivot**  
**VENUE:** The Sydney Institute, 41 Phillip Street, Sydney 2000 **LIGHT REFRESHMENTS**
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- SPEAKER:** **THE HON MIKE BAIRD MP** (NSW State Treasurer)  
**DATE:** Thursday 14 November 2013 *Bookings from 1 Nov only* **TIME:** 5.30 for 6pm  
**VENUE:** King & Wood Mallesons, Level 61, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney

**FREE TO ASSOCIATES & ASSOCIATES' ONE GUEST / \$5 STUDENTS / \$10 OTHERS**  
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