



Australia Day: day of joy, mourning or reflection?

Knowing as we do of the historic atrocities against Australia's indigenous population, how should we view Australia Day?

Is there more to Australia Day than beer, barbecues and burnt shoulders? Rather than being a day for thoughtful reflection on our history and our values, it is starting to look more like a contest to see how much meat you can eat and how much alcohol you can stomach.

Two hundred and twenty-four years ago on January 26, the First Fleet arrived at Sydney Cove and raised the Union Jack to symbolise the start of British colonisation. January 26 is the date chosen to celebrate Australia Day and all this country has achieved, but it appears that not everyone is celebrating.

Mick Dodson, this country's first ever Aboriginal law graduate and 2009 Australian of the Year, explains, "To many indigenous Australians, in fact most indigenous Australians, it really reflects the day in which our world came crashing down." This "crash" was exacerbated by the introduction of guns, alcohol and a variety of new diseases.

In 1938, William Cooper – an indigenous man who famously led an Aboriginal protest to the German embassy against Kristallnacht – planned a day of mourning on the 150th anniversary of settlement. In 1988, the term "Invasion Day" was coined, and since then many indigenous communities stage Invasion Day protests and concerts as an alternative way of marking January 26.

I have spent the last five Australia Days on Jewish Aid Australia's Derech Eretz program, which takes 12 Jewish young adults to run school-holiday activities in the remote Aboriginal communities of Toomelah and Boggabilla in northern NSW. On our 10-hour drive north from Sydney, we stop off at the site where the Myall Creek Massacre took place. On June

My generation

GARY SAMOWITZ

10, 1838, a gang of stockmen, led by a squatter, rode into Myall Creek Station, roped 28 Aboriginal men, women and children together and dragged them about 800 metres behind their horses and then hacked them to death.

Do we bear some responsibility for Australia's dark history even though many of us arrived in Australia in recent generations?

Standing at this unique memorial, the group is silent, reflecting on what this site means to us as Australians, Jews, humans. Questions start buzzing around the group: Why did such brutality take place here? Do we bear some responsibility for Australia's dark history even though many of us arrived in Australia in recent generations? How does it feel being here on Australia Day? Why was this memorial only created in the last 10 years?

Visiting Myall Creek certainly engages the participants, and the discussions around memory, identity, and reconciliation are at the same time empowering and challenging. The group gains an understanding of why some refer to Australia Day as Survival Day – the day indigenous Australians affirm that in spite of losing their land, in the face of shooting and exploitation and hardship they – a determined, resilient people – have survived these 224 years.

There have been calls for the date to be changed and a more inclusive date chosen – marking a different

landmark in our national history – where all Australians can unite and celebrate together.

Former NSW premier Bob Carr disagrees about changing the date and stated that we should approach Australia Day to understand, celebrate, commemorate and, yes, mourn, our nation's history in its entirety. He continues that it is the one day that speaks of all that happened: the good and bad, the inspiring and shaming. The story of us all.

The Myall Creek Memorial was created by descendants of the victims together with descendants of the perpetrators. They meet every year at the site to grieve, share and remember.

For reconciliation to occur, there needs to be an honest acknowledgment of our history. Aboriginal Australians naturally have a different perspective on Australia's history to that of many immigrant Australians. A proper acknowledgment of history is basic to understanding the present circumstances and claims of indigenous Australians. Guilt is perhaps not a useful tool for reconciliation; a comprehensive understanding of our shared history is – accepting that our shared history may have multiple narratives.

Guilt should not be the driving force behind changing Australia Day to be more inclusive. Acts of reconciliation result in a stronger, more unified and proud country.

The Derech Eretz participants leave the Myall Creek Massacre site sobered and saddened, but focused on the trip ahead and hopeful of their ability to make a contribution to the communities that they are on their way to visiting.

I wish you all a meaningful holiday today that is filled with reflection on Australia's tumultuous history, and a sense of commitment to making this country a better place for all in 2012 and beyond.

Gary Samowitz is chief executive of Jewish Aid Australia.

The oldest hatred in modern attire

The Holocaust may be 67 years in the past, but anti-Semitism remains and is dressed up in the disguise of the BDS protests, UN decisions and even SBS serial *The Promise*.

JANUARY 27 represents the 67th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust are ageing and passing away, so each anniversary becomes increasingly important as all we are left with is memories. Elie Wiesel said, "If anything can, it is memory that will save humanity," but the battle against fading memory is becoming more and more difficult.

The uniqueness of the Holocaust must be remembered and commemorated in new ways as time goes on, for the Holocaust represented the lowest point in Western civilisation. It also seemed to be the logical end point of anti-Semitism: the oldest of prejudices that sadly is rearing its head again today, albeit in new guises.

Last year, Australians witnessed ugly attempts by leftist radicals to block access to Israeli-owned, locally staffed businesses. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement was a supposed protest against Israeli government action, but in truth was partly a vehicle for ancient hatreds.

Proof of this was in a BDS manual printed by Australians for Palestine last year and circulated to all MPs. Among the host of offensive assertions was one drawing a link between Israel's War of Independence and defending the Holocaust. It stated: "Just as Jews expected Germany to accept responsibility for what it did in the Holocaust, so too will the refugee issue continue to fester and frustrate attempts to bring peace to the region."

To draw such parallels is to diminish the horror of that unique tragedy. As a non-Jew, I have no personal understanding of these events. But as someone who has studied the Holocaust and walked the pathways of Auschwitz, I find it offensive for there to be any attempt to equate events in such a way. And as first-hand accounts dwindle, such moral equivalence becomes easier, for it is based on misunderstanding and, sadly in some cases, intentional misrepresentation.

Never before had an allegedly civilised nation attempted to eliminate an entire people. Never before had all the gains of the Renaissance, Enlightenment and industrial revolution been put to such evil use. But these were only the means; the driving force behind the Holocaust was not new, it was thousands of years old, it is the oldest of hatreds.

This oldest of hatreds is expressed differently in the 21st century – not through grotesque caricatures or false documents, although sadly these remain prevalent in certain parts of the world. Today, different standards are applied to the world's only Jewish state than its neighbours.

Viewpoint

SENATOR SCOTT RYAN



Why are those who protest against alleged Israeli oppression of Palestinians not permanently protesting outside the Syrian embassy against the ongoing cruelty of the Assad regime? Where are the pages of bile in certain newspapers and on certain radio stations about Assad's continued oppression? The fact that we do not see these does betray the agenda of some: to campaign against Israel itself.

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Then, of course, we have the Goldstone report, the three Durban conferences and the United Nations Human Rights Council singling out Israel for condemnation ahead of serial human rights abusers such as Sudan, Iran and North Korea. And now we have a series like *The Promise*, broadcast last month on SBS. As the Executive Council of Australian Jewry pointed out in its letter to SBS, the station maintains a code of practice that includes a clause to "avoid programming which clearly condones, tolerates or encourages discrimination".

I will not pre-empt the outcome of the investigation by SBS as to whether it breached the code by broadcasting *The Promise*, but I do have a concern that only one side of the story is shown. SBS needs to explain what it plans to do to ensure another perspective is seen. After all, I have little doubt that when scheduling decisions are made about other sensitive issues, the context in which they are broadcast is taken into account.

If a program were seen to disseminate a hostile view of one group in the community, would SBS broadcast it, even if it could be defended as factual? If *The Promise* adds to an ongoing campaign to vilify Israel then this context is important, particularly when requesting that alternative views be broadcast. Failing this test could lead to allegations the network is not meeting its goal of impartiality.

Reflecting on the horrors of the Holocaust this week, it is not just the atrocities that we should remember, it is also the lessons that remain unlearned or, as Elie Wiesel put it, the memories to save humanity.

Senator Scott Ryan is shadow parliamentary secretary for small business and fair competition and a Liberal senator for Victoria.