



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

**Knowledge must not defer to Belief and when a brave bearer of Knowledge (cradling the Future in his arms) breaks through the artificial boundaries of Belief he can change the world.**



In [The Giver](#), Jonas is the apprentice Receiver of Memory:

*From the Ashes of the Ruin, the Communities were built. Protected by the boundary of memory. All memories of the past were erased. After the Ruin, we started over, creating a New Society, one of Truth, Equality – Rules were the building blocks of that equality ... use precise language, wear your assigned clothing, take your morning medication, obey the curfew, never lie ... We lived in a world where differences weren't allowed*

*... I'm asked if I should apologise for what I did. [I'll let you decide](#) ...*

[Jonas becomes a living Record](#). He is given new Rules that apply to him alone:

1. Report directly to the Receiver of Memory for your training.
2. From this moment you are exempt from all Rules governing rudeness. You may ask any question.
3. Aside from your daily medication, you may not receive other medicines, especially those for pain.
4. You may not discuss your training with anyone – ever.
5. You may lie.

### 2020, June 11: [What a Difference a Word Makes](#)

There is uproar over use of the word "[occupation](#)" to describe the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453. Meanwhile, Saudi school children will now be taught to regard Ottoman rule over the peninsula as an "[occupation](#)" rather than an outpost of the caliphate. The word "[racism](#)" is to be re-defined in Merriam-Webster. The term "[Israeli cuisine](#)" is condemned as a form of cultural appropriation. Meanwhile [statue rows](#) are breaking out all over, [even here](#) (unsurprisingly, some would say).

If meaning and memory are being suffused within an homogenized reimagining, the struggle to understand our past becomes submerged within a struggle to understand our present. Ah ha, I hear you say, 'twas ever thus. I am not sure, however, that [ideological intent](#) (the weaponization of facts and artefacts or, in the alternative view, their reconceptualization, hardly their neutralization) was ever so overt or that self-consciousness has always been so aggressively over-borne by self-righteousness.

[Revisionism](#) can mean opposing thesis with antithesis in the hope of reaching synthesis as the next step along the road to understanding. Custodians of meaning and memory have an especially difficult path to tread because we are simultaneously looking for understanding



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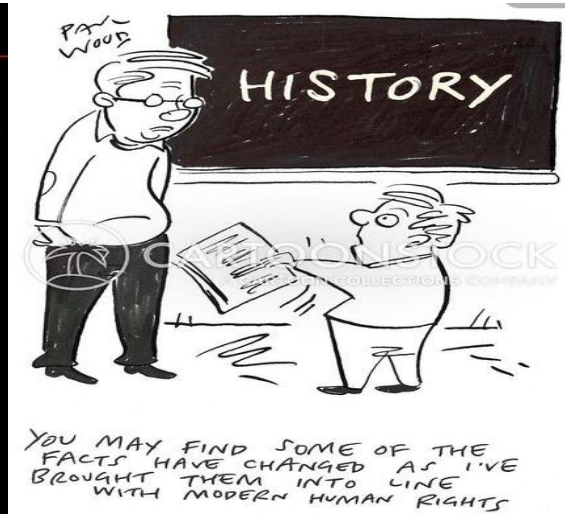
ourselves and trying to help others to do so. Is it possible that our own voyage of discovery becomes an obstacle to serving others in theirs? Jenkinson, I think, would say yes.

I have told before how I once had a row with Sue McKemmish and Marg Burns over introduction of the word “patriarchal” into a description of executive government in 19<sup>th</sup> century Victoria. My objection then was that the word was anachronistic (belonging to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and out of place when documenting a colonial administration) but *Merriam Webster* claims it was used as far back as 1632. I think of it now (and possibly then at a subconscious level) as being a dispute over reinterpretation.

I think this problem (supposing you agree with me that it is a problem) is more acute now than it was then and from retirement I congratulate you all for living in interesting times.

**PostModern Attack on Metanarratives**

- Feminist films challenge dominant cultural metanarratives
- *Farewell My Concubine*:
  - ✦ Legalism and communism (Mao Marxism)
  - ✦ The state is the answer
- *Fire*:
  - ✦ Patriarchal-based myths and legends



<<**Michael Piggott: Coincidental to Chris' reflections on words and their shifting meanings and uses, I've recently happened upon the term "sousveillance" as explained by Ethan Zuckerman drawing on its coining by inventor Steve Mann. See "Why filming police violence has done nothing to stop it" in the "MIT Technology Review". The piece is also fascinating in illustrating the importance of the social context of recordkeeping. [Or should that be "record keeping", or even "record-keeping"]]>>**

**2020, June 12:**

You don't have to agree with Howard/Abbott rhetoric about black-armband history to feel unease about the revisionism being expressed during the current excitement vented on cultural artefacts like GWTW and *Birth of a Nation* or on statuary like that of Baden-Powell or WSC. Why these? Why now? Of course, it's being driven by pent up frustrations and long standing rage over systemic racism and murder, by un-righted wrongs, and by the persistent evasions of over-bearing power. Those immediate causes are prompting an upsurge of long-held grievance that is over-flowing into a kind of solidarity movement amongst those who are sympathetic. It's become a vehicle for expressing various discontents that is sweeping up many from the usually disorganised (and often apathetic) mainstream and from the commonly quiescent amongst the affluent. Will it last? Who knows? I'm reading Rapport's 1848 which tells how liberal and nationalist elements initially prevailed and then fragmented, turned to in-fighting, persecuted minorities, and finally prompted a reaction from the respectable against the outrages of the most extreme elements. Will there be a reaction now? Will apathy and disorganisation return?

I'm troubled by the enthusiasm because I doubt its intellectual integrity and I grieve that skepticism is not the norm. The well springs of rage are genuine enough but the focus is distorted. You may dismiss me for not understanding the connection between a statue and oppression, but I might just as well dismiss you for not understanding the difference. There are no revisionist doubts being vented now that aren't already known (or knowable). We've



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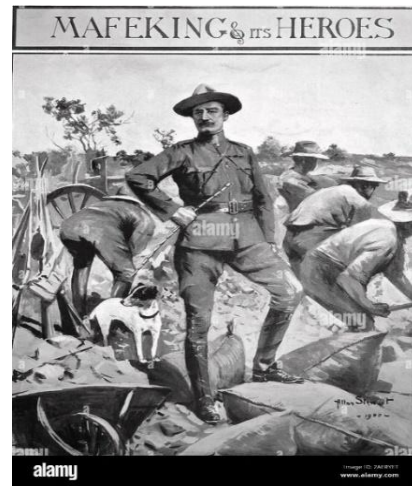
always known (or at least have no good reason not to) that books and films distort and misrepresent the past.

- We know that Churchill was an enthusiastic supporter of terror bombing, first against Iraqi tribesmen, then against Germany and (if he'd been able to) against the Irish.
- We know that Baden-Powell starved the blacks in Mafeking to feed the whites and there is evidence he covered up violence against blacks in Rhodesia.

And many, many more.



Young Winston Churchill



Baden-Powell

Why do we have to wait for an upsurge of outrage for myths and distortions to be finessed? Why are skepticism and a sense of proportion so conspicuously absent from the common sensibility and from our education systems? Should our everyday work of keeping memory and materials be based on a transitory, passionate ideological commitment or on an enduring passion for empirical truth? Now, there's a dichotomy for you – one that is quite possibly false.

And now, here's something from the odd sock drawer:

Russia said it would launch a criminal investigation on Friday after Czech officials removed a statue of a Soviet-era general in Prague. The bronze statue of Soviet Marshal Ivan Konev was taken down last week to make way for a World War II memorial, prompting the Russian embassy to protest. City officials in the Czech capital said the statue would be moved to another site. Removal of Soviet statues by Western-leaning countries once loyal to Moscow often sparks outrage in Russia as a visible sign of its waning influence. On Thursday, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu wrote to his Czech counterpart Lubomir Metnar asking him to hand over the statue to Russia ...

Prague district 6 mayor Ondrej Kolar told the Czech CTK news agency that Konev's statue would be placed in a "museum dedicated to the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Czechoslovakia." Pro-Russian Czech President Milos Zeman echoed Russian outrage over the move as "an abuse of the state of emergency," referring to a government-imposed lockdown due to the coronavirus. The statue was first put up in 1980, seven years after Konev's death.

A nice illustration of the difference between publicly flaunting toxic assets and hiding them discretely away. And how depressing that a memory institution is used for the latter purpose..

**<<Mark Brogan: The post modernists amongst us will no doubt revel in the notion of false dichotomy. But as a profession, we stand for the integrity of memory. What precisely should ASA be doing in response to the current crisis in memory caused by**





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**the destruction and desecration of monuments? Afterall, it's a small step from this to the sanitisation of documentary memory. The ASA Advocacy Committee could take a position. But it needs to be guided by what members want.>>**

Yeah. Winston Smith is alive and well. How can I sanitise memory, let me count the ways.

- Pressure groups organized around political correctness and religious conservatism lead textbook publishers to self-censor. Such self-censorship ultimately results in dry, unenlightening textbooks. Lifeless material draws education away from more developed forms of teaching history. This study demonstrates how textbook publishers' censoring textbooks fosters a teaching of history that degrades knowledge and promotes specific ideologies.
- If you're unfamiliar with "historical nihilism" here's a little background. It's China's term for public scepticism about the Communist Party's version of past events. It's an expression that has been getting a lot of play in China in recent years, since the Party launched a campaign against historical nihilism – basically, against anything critical of the Party's legacy, its past leaders or its leadership.
- ... the opponents of free speech can drown out ideas and language they don't like by using robotic tools, fake accounts, or teams of real people operating multiple accounts. They can flood the information space with false, distracting or irrelevant information so that people have trouble understanding what is real and what is fake.
- Hundreds of teachers and students are engaged in protests against the new school board's proposal to form a review committee, tasked with ensuring curricula focus on topics that promote patriotism, respect for authority and free enterprise. More specifically, the committee will identify and weed out materials that "encourage or condone civil disorder, social strife or disregard of the law." ... The New York Times reports one student saying, "You can't erase our history. It's not patriotic." Some see banning topics that "encourage or condone civil disorder" as akin to relegating iconic figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and César Chávez—as well as less well-known crusaders for justice—to the margins of our national memory. Others are asking how any U.S. history class *cannot* involve nuanced engagement with the civil rights movement, labor movements and other pivotal events in the long march for justice.
- etc, etc, etc.

Our focus (I think) should not be on controlling or correcting how information is used or misused but on the integrity of sources. That is what we stand for, isn't it? Standing up for open-ness is all well and good but I think a stand against censorship, partiality, distortion, and suppression is even better and right up our alley. Or should be. Can it happen to us? It already has. Look back at earlier threads on toxic assets.

**2020, June 13:**

**<<Andrew Waugh: Statues are never historical \*evidence\* - at least not in the way that the posters in this list seem to think – and it follows that their removal is not destroying history ... At best they are historical evidence that a group in society considered the event worthy of commemoration. They are a symbol for the values and beliefs of that group. As a symbol to one group it is inevitable that they are an anti-symbol to other groups that do not share those values and beliefs ... it is notable that while groups are willing to quietly acknowledge that the person or event commemorated \*may\* have had bad aspects, it is essentially impossible to get these bad aspects even \*mentioned\* on the plaques at the site, let alone have a balanced view of the person or event. The commemorative symbolism is current and potent ... I see no problem whatsoever with their removal. If the statue has artistic merit, it could go into an art gallery. If you want to preserve the historic evidence of the symbolism (not of the event itself), a**



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representative example or two could go into a museum. The rest can be destroyed ... This is perfectly in accordance with our values and practices as recordkeepers and archivists. We destroy at least 95% of all records created when they outlive their purpose. Even records that have made it into archives are subject to reappraisal and can be deaccessioned.>>

**<<Statues, and other commemoration sites, are invariably erected later than the event they commemorate. At best they are historical evidence that a group in society considered the event worthy of commemoration. They are a symbol for the values and beliefs of that group.>>**

They are that but they are also a memory of the past. No different (in essence) to any other (a book, a play, a TV show). This “poster to the list” has never thought of them any other way (or suggested otherwise, I believe). I think this point is facile. Statues aren’t history, they are (to use Andrew’s own term) commemorations. The history involved here is not the seed event(s) but the battle over memory of them.

*We cannot comfortably design a better system for documenting the number of heads being processed through the gas chambers as if good recordkeeping (in a technical sense) can be divorced from the uses to which it is put. We cannot forget that Trotsky was airbrushed out of a photograph or that Winston Smith was an archivist.*

**<<it follows that their removal is not destroying history>>**

I would use the word “reshaping history” rather than “destroying history”. I can’t see how removing a statue is materially different to controlling other interpretations of history by proscribing the contents of text books, drowning out contrary discourse, howling down or bowdlerising unwelcome interpretations, or withdrawing an episode of *Fawlty Towers*. The only possible moral difference is between the motives of those who celebrate slavers and those who decry them. The question for us, therefore, is what motives and values should we bring to the making and keeping of records of slavery. It is a question of how we stand professionally in relation to culture wars because, as Mark says, if we stand by today, tomorrow they may come for us. We don’t erect statues to Adolf Hitler but the [rehabilitation of Genghis Khan](#) is going gang busters. As recordkeepers do we care? If we do, [what are the limits?](#)

You’ll notice that I slyly slipped in *Fawlty Towers* onto my list – an artefact rather than a commemoration.



**Genghis Khan Memorial**



**Captain Cook Memorial**

**<<As a symbol to one group it is inevitable that they are an anti-symbol to other groups that do not share those values and beliefs. The iconography, for example, of the Captain Cook statues has been well covered in The Conversation.>>**



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That's no reason to take sides. Whatever we think personally, our professional stance must be as agnostic as we can possibly be towards cultural values and beliefs. Even those of us arguing for a more socially responsible use of records on behalf of the marginalised and downtrodden have never suggested tampering with the record (at least not so I've heard). Remaining agnostic is uncomfortable and unpalatable to many of us but I can't see how we can do our job any other way and I've yet to hear a convincing argument on how we can combine curatorial integrity with other values and beliefs. Cold-bloodedly separating them is impossible. We're human after all. But that is no reason not to try. There are limits, as I indicated at Winnipeg in 2001, so it is a matter of where those limits lie.

**<<That this symbolism is current, not just historical, is shown by the fury generated when the symbol is damaged, removed, or even suggested for removal.>>**

Doesn't recognising that the symbolism is current make it even more urgent that we reject it in our work? If we subscribe to contemporary bias how can we recognise and deal effectively with historical bias except in ideological terms?

**<<it is essentially impossible to get these bad aspects even \*mentioned\* on the plaques at the site, let alone have a balanced view of the person or event.>>**

I agree, Contextualisation for the purpose of "balance" is just a mealy-mouthed way to reinterpret history. I'm all for contextualisation (I'm the Description Guy, after all) but this is a discussion about the **purpose** of contextualisation.

**<<This is perfectly in accordance with our values and practices as recordkeepers and archivists. We destroy at least 95% of all records created when they outlive their purpose. Even records that have made it into archives are subject to reappraisal and can be deaccessioned.>>**

And we worry about this, don't we? Does our selection fairly represent the past is a totally different question to should we reshape the archive to better reflect contemporary values and beliefs. How can we reshape and explain the material to better reflect what they mean? Our descriptive and appraisal practices are continually influenced by our perception of the changing values of society (then and now) but the paramount determinants of our practices must be recordkeeping values not cultural ones. One purpose of our contextualisation is to amplify the bias of the records-maker not to smother it.

**AFTER ALL STATUES ARE GONE AND HISTORY IS ERASED:**



"I'll meet you at the open space behind the other open space."



"Those who don't study history are doomed to repeat it. Yet those who *do* study history are doomed to stand by helplessly while everyone else repeats it."

So far, this has all been about self-conscious bias. I'm waiting for someone to post about the recordkeeper's unconscious bias.

**<<Michael Piggott: Regarding Chris' last sentence (recordkeepers' unconscious bias), I highly recommend Ciaran Trace's "What is recorded is never simply 'What**





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Happened’: record keeping in modern organizational culture”, Archival Science 2(1): 137-59. The entire piece in effect is about unconscious bias, her examples mostly drawn from police recordkeeping, a highly topical issue. It opens with an LAPD arrest report of the subduing of Rodney King in 1991. Many Australian reports (including royal commissions and coronial inquiries) into aboriginal deaths in custody have revealed the same reality. >>

**2022 June 14:**

<<Andrew Waugh: Two interpretations of the practice of removal of commemorations from The Conversation

- <https://theconversation.com/public-sculpture-expert-why-i-welcome-the-decision-to-throw-bristols-edward-colston-statue-in-the-river-140285>
- <https://theconversation.com/Friday-essay-taking-a-wrecking-ball-to-monuments-contemporary-art-can-ask-what-really-needs-tearing-down-140437> >>

Whence comes the idea that offending statuary should be consigned to museums? Are they less offensive when put in a vault or display space in a memory institution rather than left in the open? Should we be offended because it shows people believe that what goes on in our space doesn’t really matter? Should we invite attack so we can validate ourselves with the thought that a museum is as important to people as a public square? Perhaps we soon will be.

Churchill told the Palestine Royal Commission that he did not admit wrong had been done to Native Americans or aboriginal Australians as “a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place”.

In the context in which those words were spoken, Jewish displacement of the Palestinians should be seen as equally offensive. But it’s not. Outrage too is discriminatory. Voices are being raised that spreading the focus of fury will “decentre” black-on-white oppression. Dissent among the dissenters. Are any values (established or insurrectionary) stable and enduring? Of course not.

What then do we stand for – continuity or change? Universal values or exceptionalism? If we stand aloof, we detach our work from its social context. If we do not, we must explain and relate our work (in some way or another) to current controversies – we must join the fray, take sides, and (maybe) cease to be safe spaces. I am frankly amazed that GLAM institutions that house the most enduring memories haven’t yet been targeted. Ethnic cleansing is much more focused – they go for libraries, archives, and museums first.

So, should we embrace “heritage laws” that protect us and what we curate from the fury? Or, should we (bravely) proclaim that we are seamlessly part of our society and that toxic assets we hold should be treated no differently to any others and they should not be specialy protected? What rationale would we use to justify special treatment?

<<Andrew Waugh: The thing that sticks in my craw is “Whatever we think personally, our professional stance must be as agnostic as we can possibly be towards cultural values and beliefs.” IMHO, this is where we diverge ... No. As a memory professional I’m not going to be agnostic towards the cultural values and beliefs of slavery, for example. Or racial suppression. Or genocide. This absolutely does not mean that I think that we should destroy the memory artifacts that document the history of abhorrent practices. That would, of course, sanitise history and mean that the people and societies that practised these practices would get off scot free ... But when applied to commemorative objects in situ this ignores the fact that the objects are not in the past. They are in our present ... They are not just an historic view of a person or event, but a current view as well ... The key here is that by removing the commemorative object from its situation, we are changing it from being a commemoration to being evidence of commemoration.>>



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I suppose it could be argued that artefacts in public places are provocatively commemorative – intended to glorify and endorse – whereas those kept in memory houses are more reflective, innocently straight forward, inclusive and nuanced – not celebratory at all – and, what is even more important, are seen as such by an otherwise infuriated populace. And, even better, it's OK to be condemnatory. Indeed, that is what you do seem to be arguing. That's fine, so long as our “evidencing” doesn't inflame anyone who is likely to attack us, I suppose. So, we're safe. We can transport toxic assets into a more rarefied context. We can take sides. We can even assume a moral posture. So long as we don't alienate people like us, maybe? But no! There is a long chronicle of controversial exhibitions in [art galleries](#) and [museums](#) (many about controversial sponsorship) but others include-

- Deaccessioning white, male artists to diversify a collection
- Removing the figure of a “comfort woman” featured in an exhibition dealing with censorship in Japan (no less!)
- Unapologetic celebration of Belgium's colonial legacy
- Banning the term “[Golden Age](#)” when describing 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch commerce
- Sanitising [torture](#) in a Washington museum

Indeed, there's an online thesis that argues: [museums and controversy, you can't have one without the other](#). I think this all means that GLAM has street cred, after all. It gets worse for us when a house of memory is perceived (rightly or wrongly) to be [taking sides](#) in contemporary controversy or pushing a party line. We may take comfort from the thought that traditionally users of archives are fewer and less bolshie. The Internet may change that. I'm not deprecating your ethical standards, Andrew, but I can't see how attacking slavery in a house of memory is materially different from attacking it in the street. My question though is this. When we are attacked, how do we defend ourselves? By saying we took no line or by saying we took the correct one?



**Seoul: “Comfort Woman” Statue Across from Japanese Embassy**



**Washington DC: International Spy Museum**

**2020 June 15:**

**<<IMHO, this is where we diverge>>**

If we're swapping humble opinions, here's mine: an agnostic account of the facts of slavery is far more devastating than a passionate denunciation. But this too is just another personal opinion (mine in this case) and nothing to do with curatorial integrity. It would (if correct) be an incidental consequence of curatorial integrity, not its purpose.

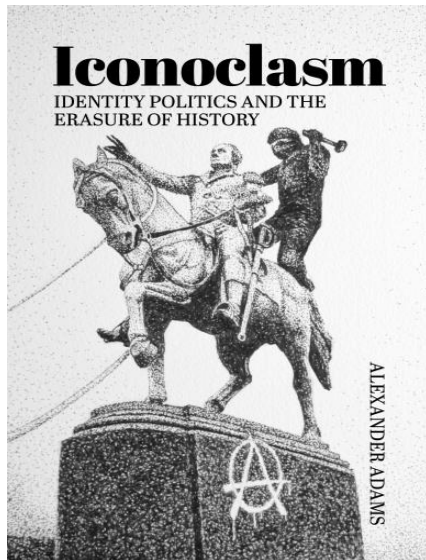
You may say that Harriet Beecher Stowe proves me wrong, but what made [Uncle Tom's Cabin](#) an effective diatribe was not its moralistic preaching (of which there is much) but the artfully contrived [appearance](#) that it gave a factual account of the condition of anti-bellum slavery in the South. It was then and has since been denounced as a falsification of slavery, defended by HBS herself as having been based on the testimony of former slaves, sneered at





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by critics for being “sentimental”, and condemned for promoting racist stereotypes (affectionate, dark-skinned mummies, pickaninnies, and dutiful, long-suffering retainers). It has been through the furnace of the whole range of moral relativism, revisionism, and cultural tribalism, in fact. It has even been nominated as one of his good-bad books by George Orwell (no less). To my mind, however, its power over the many, many readers it affected in its time came not from what it is but from what those readers believed it to be – quite simply, true.



We need to position ourselves on the right side of history (or, at least, give the appearance of doing so) without being too blatant about it. So, maybe both sides of this are proved right in the end. To be effective, stick to the truth. If you can fake that, you're home.

<<Michael Piggott: ... Recalling something from the time I was at the University of Melbourne Archives (UMA), I got to know slightly Charles and Primmie Bright who were the then Melbourne links to the extended and renowned Bright family and to a number of extensive collections of business and family papers, the jewel in one sense being the papers of Gibbs, Bright & Co founded by Charles Edward Bright and whose father Robert was a slaveowner (“His father was a slaveholder who was compensated £8,384 by the British government for 404 slaves upon the abolition of slavery. Bright would benefit from his father’s estate” ). The current family never denied this connection, in fact have supported the listing and digitization the many family related collections, and nor has the Archives. It noted there were slave registers in its 1983 published Guide to Collections and almost celebrated them in 2016 in “A fortune built on slavery”, an article by archivist Millicent Weber for “The Conversation”. In fact, UMA has further slave related material, readily discoverable by doing a simply search of the UMA Archives online catalogue on “slave”. So, no passionate denunciation, just acknowledging it happened (“The insight the collection provides into slavery and the sugar trade is a disturbing reminder of the atrocious violations of basic human rights that funded colonial expansion”), pointing out there is documentation here in Australia whereas you might expect it to be in the UK. [Of course, our Prime Minister and his young tech savvy advisers seem not to know this, yet it takes 10 seconds searching to discover the truth .... as it does that the HMB Endeavour didn’t circumnavigate “Australia”.>>

<<Joanna Sassoon: There is an interesting database out of UCL relating to the legacies of slave ownership. And a \$660,000 project in Western Australia building on the project at UCL. Western Australian Legacies of British Slavery . This project aims to bring Australia into the global history of slavery by exploring the legacies of British slavery in Western Australia. Through developing innovative methods for biographical research and digital mapping, it will trace the movement of capital,



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people and culture from slave-owning Britain to WA, and produce a new history of the continuing impact of slavery wealth in shaping colonial immigration, investment, and law. Expected outcomes of this project include enhanced capacity to build international disciplinary collaborations, new research methods, and a major national online exhibition. Benefits include a radically new perspective on Australian history and abolition in the present, with major public outcomes.>>

**2020 June 16:**

<<Mark Brogan: Statues are never historical \*evidence\* - at least not in the way that the posters in this list seem to think – and it follows that their removal is not destroying history. Statues erected to individuals seem to me to be artifactual evidence of beliefs held at a particular time about the subject's role in historical events. As such, they are evidence of individual or collective interpretation of the role of an individual in historical events. Purging of a nation's disagreeable monuments can never amount to destroying history, since they are not history, rather they are artifactual evidence of belief at a particular time. Acknowledging that statues constitute a kind of evidence and that archivists see themselves as players in the evidence and memory game, we have to ask ourselves, should we engage with this debate or remain on the sidelines? Do we have skin in the game? Purists will say no, because ours is a concern with documentary memory. But this is a little tricky, since we have flirted with objects as important to our mission through notions of 'places of creation'. Also spill over effects from the culture wars over memory and memorialisation are already with us. In WA in 2018, it was revealed that the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages was redacting certificates, without consulting affected individuals, to remove 'offensive' racially charged terminology. The WA Government argued that that this was being done in the interests of avoiding 'distress' to indigenous people, the main category of affected individuals. The practice came to light after an indigenous man, Garry Smith, protested the issue and went public accusing the Government of expunging his identity as an indigenous person, by removing the term Aboriginal from certificates. Through its President, ASA Inc. lodged a protest with the WA Government. It was supported by the History Council of WA. This case is notable not just because it is specific to our domain, but also because it shows that assumptions about how indigenous people view the evidence of system racism is more nuanced than we think. The act of expungement was viewed in this instance, as 'whitewashing'. Setting aside the intellectual complexities of the case for and against the retention of artifactual evidence of oppression, there are other reasons why removal and expungement may be a bad idea and archivists should engage. Specifically, in the UK removal has galvanised right wing extremists posing a threat to civil order and public safety. The potential for this to happen in Australia should not be under-estimated. On 14 June, ABC's Background Briefing delivered a frightening expose of Australia's racist, growing radical right. Archivists have been working with sensitive evidence of colonial oppression for many years and have methods and approaches that are of value in the context of the current debate and that are accepted by First Nations Peoples. Communicating them, would seem like a sensible option at this point in time.>>

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Speaking as purist. I trust people understand (even if they will not allow) the distinction between personal values and professional values. Which is what I take this thread to be about. I share my interior life with my friends, not with my peers. Perhaps that's why I have so few friends. My little joke about faking truth would be deplorable in any other context. And, as it happens, I don't think we should fake the truth even on professional grounds – too much danger of being found out (a utilitarian reason rather than a moral one).



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Agreed. Wholeheartedly. A big hurrah for that. But first we need to be sure (very, very sure) that we have a professional consensus (or as near as all get out) on what these methods and approaches are. And for my money, communicating them would be anything but remaining “on the sidelines”.

<<Andrew Waugh: No. We absolutely should not make decisions about what we do based on fear of the ultra right wing doing their nana. Yes, the white majority should not be deciding what the indigenous community wants or needs – this includes unilaterally removing commemorative objects. I would hope that any changes that take place in a spirit of consultation and listening. This is especially the case given that it is unlikely that any community will speak with one voice.

Yes, I agree that commemorative objects provide evidence of community views at the time they were erected, not of history per se (\*). But I think that the dimension that’s overlooked in this debate is that *they are not just historical objects*. They are still commemorative objects today, and their continued existence reflects current community views. This is made even more obvious by the clash between different groups in society over the objects; if they didn’t have current value as symbols, no-one would care if they were removed or left.

Chris gently mocked my suggestions about what could happen to the objects without really engaging with the symbolism. The key, for me, is to reduce or eliminate the commemoration while retaining the evidence of the commemoration. As Chris points out, the objects may be as offensive even though they are held in a gallery or museum (and not necessarily on public display) rather than in their original commemorative setting. I think not. As I hope Chris would agree, it’s all about context. I think it’s essentially impossible to recontextualise a commemorative object in its original commemorative setting. You have a chance to do so if you change the setting.

If you want to drag this subject back to the archives, I would suggest the correct parallel is that commemorative objects equate to archival description. Archival description is an interpretation of the records from a particular view point at a particular time. Archival description is certainly a record in its own right – a record of the archives. But I hope no-one would argue that an archival description, once written, can never be superseded or changed to reflect a better understanding of the records. In the same way, I see no reason why commemorations should be static.

(\*) I should note that this view is absolutely not shared by most commentators – see Boris Johnson, for example. For these commentators, changing or destroying a commemoration is changing or destroying history. They see no difference between the symbol and the thing.>>

**2020 June 17:**

<<Chris Gousmett: Could I point readers who may be interested to an article I wrote in 2017 concerning controversies over a memorial in Lower Hutt, NZ, relating to an action in the Land Wars in 1846? This memorial has had its share of criticisms over the years although these seem rather minor compared to what is now ensuing in the USA and UK as well as becoming a major issue in NZ. This covers some of the issues around whether memorials which are now seen as inaccurate or offensive should be modified or removed. I also address briefly the issue of Confederate memorials which were being fought over at the time the article was written – and are now being fought over again.>>





## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

**2020 June 23:**

<<Andrew Waugh: From a museum professional with specific professional experience on putting confederate statues in a museum...>>

**2020 June 24:**

<<Andrew Waugh: The History Council of Victoria is hosting a webinar on ‘Public Monuments, Contested Histories’ on 14 July from 1700-1830 ... >>

**2020 June 26:**

<<Andrew Waugh: I’m sorry, Chris, I meant to respond earlier. I wanted to thank you. It’s rare that we’ve got such a detailed examination of the history of a commemoration. In my view, your examination of the historical nature of this commemoration shows exactly why they need to be thought about.

First, the meaning of the battle to the contemporary white locals (and their descendents – for nearly 80 years after the event) is odd. Consider. The original commemorative marker was removed from where the fallen soldier’s comrades had placed it and ‘stored in the chapel’. That it was removed suggests, to me, that at some point the land on which it was situated was reused for some other purpose – hardly the action of a community that considered the grave and memorial significant. The location of the graves of the fallen soldiers has been comprehensively ‘forgotten’ – even to the extent that the sergeant’s grave, in a cemetery, is not documented. The mass grave of the other ranks is thought to be on the local golf course, but no one has cared enough to do any investigation. This, to me, suggests that the contemporary locals wanted to forget the battle (at best), did not consider it significant enough to remember (at worst), or considered the deaths of soldiers to be irrelevant (the contemporary sentiments of Kipling’s Tommy spring to mind).

Second, the current commemorative marker was erected nearly 80 years after the event specifically in the context of remembering the dead New Zealand soldiers of the first world war. The original idea of simply re-erecting the original commemorative marker was quickly replaced, mainly due to objections from a historical society (did they consider that the memorial stone shouldn’t be moved from where it was stored in the cemetery chapel? Where is it now?). The new marker was specifically of the form and type used for WWI memorials, and the War Graves Division that was established to erect WWI memorials was involved and partially funded the memorial. It’s very hard to go past the obvious symbolism of commemorating British New Zealanders who died defending the Empire from the enemy. In this case, of course, the enemy was the original inhabitants of the land. Even then, it is notable that no unveiling of the monument occurred. Plans for a significant event – even involving the GG – kept falling through for trivial reasons, a fact which suggests there was still, in the ‘20s, ambivalence about the event and its memory.

The commemoration does not mention the Maori fallen. Your careful work in the files shows that there were no records of any deaths, and why this was so (the Maori took their dead and wounded with them). The files also show that, in the face of this archival silence, no one thought to simply ask the Maori community whether anyone had died, and if they were willing to share any details about them. It’s hard to escape the conclusion that faced with the accusation that the memorial was one sided, they came up with an easy answer that supported the status quo, and avoided having to ask, and answer, hard questions about the form of the memorial.

In a similar vein, when tasked with the accusation that the inscription was biased, the files show that the answer was that the mayor simply asserted that he had had a ‘long association’ with local Maori people, and that no-one had complained to him. The files show that no one thought to consult with the community about what they thought. Again, a simple, easy answer that supported the status quo. And an answer that was just accepted without question.

This is one memorial, but it raises questions about the changing nature of memory to community over time - the community at the time of the event and during



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

living memory afterwards, the community at the time the memorial was raised, and the community today. What is being commemorated here, and why?>>

<<Chris Gousmett: Thanks for that response. There are certainly unasked questions which we could now no longer find answers for. A couple of comments: I assumed that the original stone on the sergeant's grave was moved after the cemetery fell into some disrepair. This cemetery (Bolton St) was later the cause of great controversy when graves and grave markers were moved to make way for a motorway (1960s).

The original stone eventually was relocated to the council yards in Lower Hutt, then re-erected in the graveyard of the Anglican church of St James. This church burnt down around 1948 and in the work to clear the site the grave marker was damaged and then disposed of. A new stone was then made with the same text, this is set into the ground (like other contemporary grave markers - it is still an active burial-place) in the St James churchyard and is still evident. See footnotes 8 and 11 for details ...>>

**2020 June 28:**

### Anything but neutral

... How can institutions whose leadership is often overwhelmingly White rethink their staffing, collections and exhibitions, much less move toward more truly equitable governance? Or, some ask, should museums continue to exist in anything like their current form? ... "This is an historic moment -- a pause and reflect moment for individuals and institutions," said Makeba Clay, the chief diversity officer at the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, ... "The systemic and unrelenting injustices against members of the Black community have existed for hundreds of years and continue to exist all around us, including in our museums. We know we have work to do and that means being actively anti-racist -- not passively non-racist." ... her message is that it's not enough to "amplify" voices and messages, art institutions must take action ... Clay also said that art does not exist outside struggle. That while it can be used for "constructive discourse, building empathy and creating community," art also "can confront current issues and topics that aren't neutral." Adding: "What appears like radical action is exactly what museums need to pursue to prove that they have a valuable role to play in this national discourse."

### Becoming sites for debate

Last Friday Jill Snyder, the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Cleveland (MoCA), stepped down from her role after 22 years as the gallery's executive director. The resignation was announced in the wake of a controversy surrounding the cancellation of an exhibition by artist Shaun Leonardo, whose "The Breath of Empty Space," which deals with police brutality against Black and brown boys and men, was due to launch at MoCA this month. The decision to cancel the exhibition was made in February this year [and] the museum sent a statement of apology to Leonardo, in which they say, "we were not prepared to engage with the lived experiences of pain and trauma that the work evokes," ... MoCA followed this up with an apology to Leonardo ... which states: "[R]egretfully we did not engage Mr. Leonardo in creating space for dialogue and debate. We did not expand the conversation within our community... We failed. We are learning now." ... What follows is an edited account of Shaun Leonardo's recent experiences and thoughts on the need for institutions to do better, shared during a conversation with CNN's Ananda Pellerin.

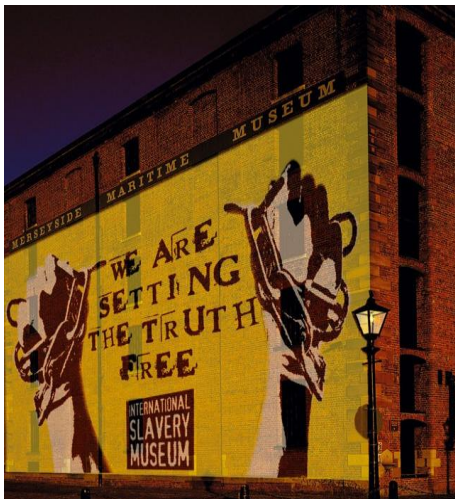
*... Over the last decade there has been a rise in exhibitions that show work by Black and brown artists at major art institutions. This, I say, is the easy part. The difficult part for institutions is to do what's necessary to hold BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) audiences with care ... So much of that responsibility is shifted onto artists who are propped up as the voice, as the commitment to these difficult dialogues, while the institutions do not truly push themselves to change ... a White institution can't enter a true and difficult relationship with the Black and brown community until they*



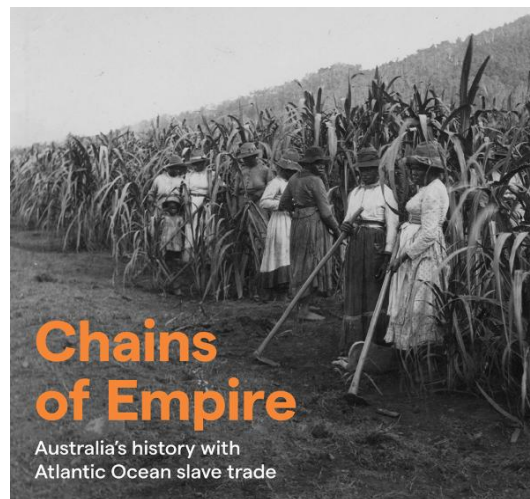
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*understand their whiteness and their privilege within that dynamic, not to mention the historical complexity of how we have all arrived at this moment ...*

*Institutions have to do two things: they have to do the internal work of assessing what it means to be an institution with gatekeeping power, and secondly, they need to confront their resistance to making room for Black and brown leadership, so those voices are already present within ... if museums resist contending with the power that they hold, we should no longer rely on them to curate the spaces for these kinds of experiences. Putting a painting on the wall is not enough. What feels different in this moment is that museums are now competing with one another in terms of what they're going to commit to. The earlier messaging around inclusivity and anti-racism was empty -- a continuation of the lip service we've seen over the past decade -- the "we will do better" that is never delivered ... We must all stay tuned to see how the institutions act in the coming years. And we all must interject when they don't. Beyond this, what I hope is that the role museums play will shift. That they will become sites for debate -- places of constructive interpersonal conflict meant not to reap immediate resolve, but to enter into complexities of thought and emotion that the rest of the world will not allow. That accountability is what I want from museums. And as an artist, this is what I'm committing to when I work with these institutions.*



**Liverpool: Slavery Museum**



**Australian Legacies**

### Contextualising slavery

The demand from BLM on houses of memory is essentially to buy into the race relations trauma of the U.S. and to incorporate slavery into a narrative of White oppression there that extends beyond 1865. This narrative, while not untrue and certainly not irrelevant for those living there, has a complexity of focus and of purpose (ideological, political, and moral) which can be sustained only by constraining the historical (and current) facts about slavery within tightly defined parameters to uphold a particular view of the present and to avoid "de-centring" the Black struggle.

- The North American [slave trade](#) was a sub-set of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade which was itself a sub-set of African slavery carried on by non-Whites.
- [Chattel slavery](#) was abolished in the modern world largely through the efforts of Whites, one reason Black leaders wanted to raise [African American regiments](#) in the Civil War (so emancipation would come partly through their own efforts).
- Slavery in the U.S. gave rise not only to oppression but also to the [politics of violence](#).
- Viewing [race-relations](#) **solely** through the prism of post-colonialism is a distortion.

### Slavery in Africa

Slavery [in historical Africa](#) was practiced in many different forms: Debt slavery. enslavement of war captives, military slavery, slavery for prostitution, and criminal slavery ... Slavery for domestic and court purposes ... Plantation slavery also occurred ... Slave relationships in Africa have been transformed through three large-scale processes: the Arab





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slave trade, the Atlantic slave trade, and the slave emancipation policies and movements in the 19th and 20th centuries ...

### Slavery South of the Equator

During the Atlantic slave trade, [Latin America](#) was the main destination of millions of African people transported from Africa to French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonies. Slavery's legacy is the presence of large Afro-Latino populations.

### Slavery in Australia

Chattel slavery was never implemented in Australia and slavery was never legally sanctioned. Groups used as [effective slave labour](#) include convicts, Indigenous Australians, coolies from China and India, and Pacific Islanders. Legal protections varied and were sometimes not enforced. This all came as [a surprise](#), apparently, to our PM.

### Beyond Emancipation

It would be going too far to say that the [attention given to the U.S.](#) (not just in matters of race relations) is a distortion - but it is always an imbalance. The post-emancipation story, though similar elsewhere, is [varied](#). Should an American house of memory uphold or challenge [exceptionalism](#)?

### Slavery today

[Modern slavery](#) is the severe exploitation of other people for personal or commercial gain. Modern slavery is all around us, but often just out of sight. People can become entrapped making our clothes, serving our food, picking our crops, working in factories, or working in houses as cooks, cleaners or nannies.

[Mauritania](#) is one of the last countries in the world where people are still born into slavery and literally owned by other people, facing a lifetime of abuse and forced labour.

**2020 June 29:**

### Contextualising civil rights

I am not alone in seeing BLM in a [wider context](#) beyond the borders of the U.S. or that the connections between [BLM and slavery](#) are complicated. But leaving slavery and the rest of the world aside for a moment (as if that is ever possible) how can BLM be fitted into the story of prejudice and persecution within the U.S? I would, even so, want to compare and contrast what goes on there with the experience in the two neighbouring countries – Canada and Mexico.

There is a long history of troubled relations with “minorities” including Asians, Irish, and Jews. Historically, religion provides one dimension of the prejudice. The British settlers fled their homeland not to escape religious persecution but to impose their own. “Others” who are Protestant (e.g. Amish, Hutterites, et al.) are (now) seen as quaint rather than threatening (or maybe just too few to worry about). But Blacks are overwhelmingly Christian, so it can't only be that.

A race-relations quadrangle exists in the U.S. formed by Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and First Nations. Mathematically, this gives rise to six axes of (possible) prejudice. BLM focuses on Black/White. Each axis represents group relations that differs in many particulars from the others. White/First Nations, for example, is a story of displacement, depopulation, and dispossession whereas White/Black is a story of importation, subordination, and exploitation. Do these differences mean that we can understand each only in its own terms and separately from the others or must we also look at them together in order to understand each of them properly as expressions of larger themes beyond the particularity? These stories focus on oppression by Whites (displacement, subordination) and what has been and



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is being done by one group to another but that may be an unbalanced way of understanding relations between them.

Unsurprisingly, I think that institutions with gatekeeping power (as Mr Leonardo calls us) should reach their own conclusions and not simply subscribe to the views of their BIPOC audience - which is not what I understand him to be saying by the way (and I agree with him that we must contend with the power that we hold). And I am not so naïve as to suppose that we can “contend” by simply lecturing others about curatorial integrity. My conclusions, inter alia, are that Black/White racism in the U.S. cannot be properly understood removed from its broader context and that context includes tension along all six axes – including (notably) [Black/Hispanic relations](#). Police violence against Blacks is of a piece with [violence against Hispanics](#) and the two can be understood as part of the same prejudice rather than simply as two different and unrelated things.

The custodial challenge is (predictably) becoming more urgent and the focus is (equally predictably) turning our way. We are being asked to “confront current issues and topics that aren't neutral”. When I speak of custodial agnosticism, I do not mean indifference (much less neutrality) towards what Verne Harris has referred to as the [call for justice](#). What I am concerned about is the integrity of the record and (yes) objectivity in the ways we think about it. I long ago argued that we cannot detach ourselves from our own social context and I hold to that. The challenge lies in figuring out **how** to relate and (if we are to maintain our own values intact) not simply to succumb.



[Black Lives Matter](#)



[Africa Museum](#)

**2020. July 1:**

The [Africa Museum](#) is a near perfect instance of a house of memory that has already had to “contend” with facts concerning its [subject-matter as well as its own history](#). It may still have a way to go before appeasing the spirit of Joseph Conrad.

The **Royal Museum for Central Africa** or RMCA ... colloquially known as the **Africa Museum**, is an ethnography and natural history museum situated in Tervuren ... just outside Brussels. It was built to showcase [King Leopold II's Congo Free State](#) in the [1897 World Exhibition](#) ... After his [Congo Free State](#) was recognized by the [Berlin Conference](#) of 1884–1885, [King Leopold II](#) wanted to publicise the [civilizing mission](#) and the economic opportunities available in the colony to a wider public, both in Belgium and internationally ... The museum stores archives documenting its own institutional history, as well as archives of private businesses, organizations, and individuals ... The publicly accessible museum itself only represents 25 percent of the activities which the museum covers ...

It had been called a museum that “has remained frozen in time” as it showed how a museum looked like in the mid-twentieth century. No mention was made of the savage excesses and pillage during Belgium's colonial era. *The Guardian* reported in July 2002 that,



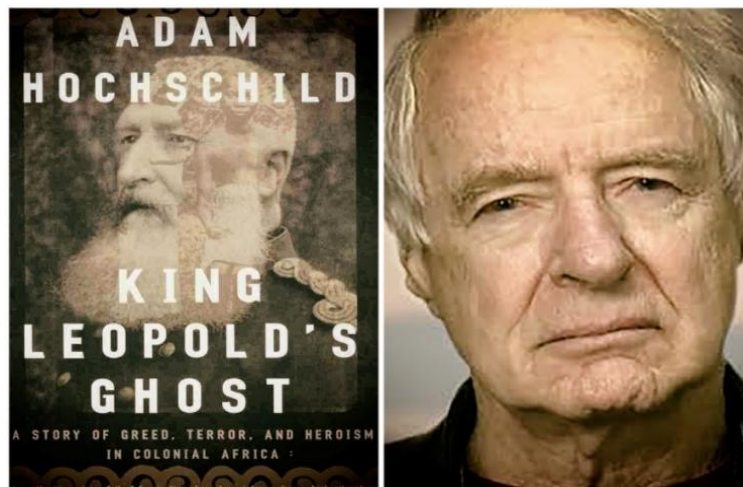
## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

after initial outrage by Belgian historians over [\*King Leopold's Ghost\*](#) by [Adam Hochschild](#), the state-funded museum would finance an investigation into Hochschild's allegations. The resulting more modern exhibition "The Memory of Congo" (February–October 2005), tried to tell the story of the Congo Free State before it became a Belgian colony and a less one-sided view of the Belgian colonial era. The exhibition was praised by the international press, with French newspaper *Le Monde* claiming that "the museum has done better than revisit a particularly stormy page in history...[it] has pushed the public to join it in looking into the reality of colonialism."

It seems that this and other Belgian memory-houses are still ahead of [public opinion](#), which may ultimately prove less resistant to Hollywood razzamatazz than to cultural re-interpretation

... debate over [Leopold's] legacy has remained muted in Belgium, where hundreds of roads are named after the king along with memorials dedicated to his memory and glory. Now, under pressure from a growing movement that believes Belgium needs to confront its past, attitudes in the corridors of power are starting to change. As part of a belated reckoning with its colonial history, museums are showcasing sins that were previously overlooked, the tone of history books in school is shifting and, in a development unthinkable until recently, cities have started to remove street signs commemorating Leopold II and openly denounce his legacy ...

While some municipalities are holding out, the reappraisal offers further evidence of a sea change in how the colonial history is viewed. Those resistant to change are likely to come under more pressure when a Hollywood film, based on [Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost*] ... is released ... Earlier this year a UN working group concluded in its preliminary report that, nearly six decades after the newly named DRC gained independence from Belgium, many of the country's institutions remained racist and the state needed to apologise for the sins of its past as a step towards reform ...



**2020, August 9:**

Educators from around the [US] have been [reflecting on what they teach and how they teach it](#) in the wake of the death of George Floyd and the national protests that followed. Some lessons up for reconsideration: the dismissive take that it was simply "the norm" that Presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson owned slaves in the late 1700s and language around Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America ... Additions to history classes might include lessons on intersectional figures, such as Bayard Rustin, the Black man who organized the 1963 March on Washington but was largely shunned in the civil rights movement because he was gay ...

Adina Goldstein, a seventh-grade social studies and English teacher in Philadelphia, said she had been thinking about how to turn her social studies class into more of an ethnic studies course to reflect more African American and Latin American history. That would, in turn, reflect the identities of the majority of her students. Goldstein, who is Chinese





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American and Jewish, said she recently spoke with a former African American history teacher, who said "something really insightful to me: 'We teach what we know.'" ...

Anton Schulzki, a high school teacher in Colorado Springs, Colorado, said the state recently held a virtual conference at which dozens of social studies teachers discussed changing their approaches to their curricula to move beyond their own biases ... "There's a decided push for us to really begin to re-examine our own biases and how we approach things in our classroom. There's a push among a lot of teachers, period, across the country to really examine how we approach things," said Schulzki, who is president-elect of the National Council for the Social Studies ...

**2020, August 15:**

*... if museums resist contending with the power that they hold,  
we should no longer rely on them to curate the spaces for  
these kinds of experiences ... (Shaun Leonardo)*

Another [example](#) of contending with both content and context -

Magnum Photos, one of the world's most celebrated photographic agencies, is to re-examine the content of its archive of more than 1 million images after accusations it made available photographs that critics said may show the sexual exploitation of minors ... As of Friday the Magnum archive was offline. An agency spokesman said: "Like many in the photographic industry, we are re-examining our past archives as we are aware there is material that may be inappropriate. Magnum has accumulated almost 1 million images over its 73-year history and we are committed to making this a comprehensive process." ...

While photo essays documenting sex workers and sexual exploitation have a long history in journalistic reportage photography, Magnum admitted it had been caught out, both by the **presence of some images** [my emphasis] in its archive, and by **the way they had been labelled in search terms** [my emphasis again] accessible to the wider public ...

What is the difference, I wonder, between a search term (merely) and one that is "accessible to the wider public". Should finding aids be more widely redacted? A further distinction is being made between content and the circumstances of creation-

... The criticism reflects a wider debate in the photographic industry over images, including some by celebrated photographers, which have been overtaken by a changing ethical landscape, not least over recording images of subjects seen as having been exploited ...

... Paul Lowe, who teaches documentary photography at the University of the Arts London and has written about the ethics of photojournalism, as well as being a well-known documentary photographer, suggested there were still questions to be answered for all photo agencies. "Any image that is currently available through any of the reputable agencies' websites has gone through process of control. Older images have been digitised and some sort of vetting has taken place. "An individual has decided that it's appropriate for the agency archive and what key words should be attached to it. No image is there by accident." He said the key issue related to consent. "What does consent and informed consent mean in photography? I think that's key. Even if a subject gives consent, does that mean you can do whatever you want with images that are problematic? "I think the whole photographic industry, across the board, are questioning their assumptions, not least the power structures and inherent way that photography has predominantly reflected male gaze, which leaves it very open to very strong arguments of exploitation."

**2020, August 26:**

### Some Readings

#### [Curatorial Activism](#)

No doubt many listers are already familiar with this work. I've only just come across it. Seems relevant to what we've been discussing in this thread.



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

“Curatorial Activism” is a term I use to designate the practice of organizing art exhibitions with the principle aim of ensuring that certain constituencies of artists are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art. It is a practice that commits itself to counter-hegemonic initiatives that give voice to those who have been historically silenced or omitted altogether—and, as such, focuses almost exclusively on work produced by women, artists of color, non-Euro-Americans, and/or queer artists.

### Code of Ethics for Curators

Issued by American Association of Museums Curators Committee (2009). States, inter alia Curatorial work is guided by the following values:

- To serve the public good by contributing to and promoting learning, inquiry, and dialogue, and by making the depth and breadth of human knowledge available to the public ...

... curators must establish intellectual control of the collection under their care ... Curators must commit themselves to developing the museum collection and interpretation of its objects with a respect for the needs of all potential patrons ... When preparing interpretive material, curators have a responsibility to an object’s creator(s) and culture of origin. When possible and appropriate, they accurately and respectfully represent the creator’s perspective, the object’s historical and cultural context, and the object’s history of use ...

### Statement of Curatorial Values

Issued by Australian National Film and Sound Archive (n.d.). States, inter alia

Curators are bound to respect the diversity of ideas, values and beliefs in the community, and should not impose their own in deciding which works are to be collected. They are responsible for developing a collection that draws on and represents the diversity of cultural, political, social, religious and other ideas of individuals and groups in the past and present society, not just the dominant ideas of their time.

### Should museums remain impartial? (2020)

... Is it the duty of museums to take a stance, or should we expect galleries and other cultural institutions to remain impartial on the subjects dominating our society? ... museums are not neutral by default. In most cases, neutrality requires more effort than asserting a clear view and, in the view of some, neutrality is an impossibility altogether – at odds with the human nature behind each and every exhibit created ... The question surrounding neutrality in museums is a complex one. So much so that the question itself isn’t really “should museums be impartial?” but “can museums be impartial?” ... Democratic cultural spaces are made by aiming for neutrality, but by recalibrating the balance of power and giving voice to those who would otherwise struggle to be heard. Through social conscious exhibitions and outreach efforts, many museums are already playing their part in this, giving voice to what’s important to their audience.

I can’t help feeling there’s a “not” missing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> last sentence quoted

**2020, September 14:**

Displaying human body parts has long been a hot topic for curators. Now, [an Oxford museum](#) has revised its practices –

For almost 80 years, the shrunken human heads at Oxford University’s [Pitt Rivers Museum](#) have fascinated and appalled visitors ... But under a major revamp to address the museum’s problematic colonial past, the heads ... have been removed from display, along with 113 other human remains, including decorated skulls, scalps and Egyptian mummies. When the Pitt Rivers, one of the world’s most important ethnological museums, reopens later this month ... visitors will instead encounter an ethical display of its collection. This will address how exhibiting human remains has “reinforced racist and stereotypical thinking” of other cultures, portraying them as “savage, primitive or gruesome”, said the museum’s director, Dr Laura Van Broekhoven.

Van Broekhoven said most of the human remains removed from display came from India, Tibet, Malaysia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, [Ecuador](#) and the Solomon Islands. Staff at the museum are reaching out to indigenous communities around the world to see whether



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they think the human remains removed from display, and hundreds more in its archives, should be repatriated to their country of origin, be redisplayed in a more respectful and accurate manner, or stay in storage.

Marenka Thompson-Odlum, a research assistant at the museum who reviewed the labelling of objects, said many human remains were originally collected and exhibited by anthropologists who believed in now-debunked, racist scientific theories ... For example, archival records about 52 hair samples from the indigenous Ainu people of Japan exoticised their long hair and their beards. “They were termed ‘the hairy Ainu’ to explain that they were more ‘barbaric’ or ‘savage’,” said Thompson-Odlum, who added that the documents suggested some of the museum’s samples were obtained by forcibly cutting Ainu people’s hair ... Three of the Pitt Rivers’ heads are thought to be authentic, with the other four believed to be forgeries made from corpses stolen from morgues and hospitals, a practice fuelled by demand from foreign collectors between the 1870s and 1930s...

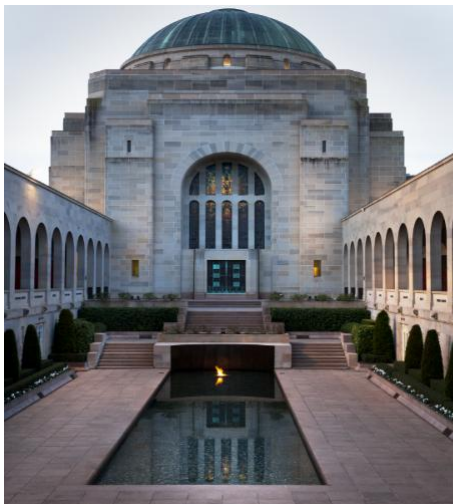
How far should this approach go? Will Egyptian mummies disappear from museums around the world? Who would be consulted about them and to whom would they be repatriated?

What is interesting here (for me) is that they are turning the display inside out. Instead of adopting a scholarly, objective tone – presenting the artefacts (possibly fallaciously) for informative purposes – they are turning the spotlight onto the ethics and integrity of curatorial practice and putting that on display. How far should curators go in contextualising curation itself for our users?

How far should apprehended bias on the part of the curator be acknowledged and whose apprehension should be preferred? When do legitimate doubts about our own prejudices begin to undermine confidence in our ability to discern the truth?

**2020, September 18:**

<<**Michael Piggott: Bias, truth, objective tone, human remains. Sounds like the Australian War Memorial to me. Earlier this week, William De Maria wrote:**



Then there is the Memorial’s unapologetic distortion of our military history. There is no critical examination of the pointlessness of so many aggressive engagements Australia has been involved in and of the shameful things done by Australian soldiers on the battlefield. Consider the historical distortions in the Afghanistan War Exhibition, which go well beyond how museums and memorials in the other Coalition allies portray their presence in that war. The US Veterans History Museum starts its exhibition with these words: “The United States has been stuck in an unwinnable quagmire in Afghanistan for years.” Then there’s this contemplation of the British intervention from the National Army Museum in Chelsea:

“The war in Afghanistan spanned the tenures of three prime ministers and cost the lives of 453 British service personnel and thousands of Afghans. What was accomplished after 13





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years of conflict, which included eight years of heavy fighting in Helmand, *still remains open to debate.*” (my emphasis added).

At the peak of the British input to the Afghanistan War, there were 137 UK bases and about 9,500 British troops in Helmand Province alone. At the height of the fighting, more than 600 flights a day used Camp Bastion’s 3.5-kilometre runway. Similarly, the Danish War Museum’s exhibition *A Distant War – A Danish Soldier in Afghanistan*, avoids the Rambo script in favour of showing visitors a young Danish soldier’s journey from the safety of his childhood bedroom to distant Afghanistan, through Camp Bastion, the Green Zone and Gereshk then home via Tune Airport. And this one was mounted without jiggling the donation tin in front of arms dealers.

This level of honesty is unimaginable at the Australian War Memorial. A visit to its Afghanistan exhibition is like a trip to the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum in Pyongyang, North Korea, where the curators leave nothing to chance that a different perspective could emerge.

Making all this worse is the Memorial’s morally contaminated relationships with arms dealers. ....>>

### 2020, September 25:

Now, here’s a word (two words actually) that might make a difference – “culturally competent”. It is a term used in health and welfare and it means, according to [one source](#) –

- open attitude (being prepared to expose yourself to diverse ideas and alternative viewpoints)
- self-awareness (turning a flashlight onto your own culture, beliefs, values, and background in order to more objectively explore what you may subconsciously be bringing to every interpersonal interaction),
- awareness of others (recognizing that all individuals are uniquely programmed with their own background, worldview, beliefs and values, and that while these may not match up with your own, they are equally valid and valuable)
- cultural knowledge (acquiring information about others’ values, norms, and beliefs, an information base from which you can engage in your own conversations and inquiries)
- cultural skills (asking more informed questions, adapting your communication style to different individuals, groups, and cultures, using active listening skills, establishing relationships based on mutual trust, clearly identifying areas of conflict or concern and recognizing their impact, making clear requests of others, implementing processes that promote organizational cultural competence and inclusion).

These are interpretations from a guidebook on medical practice, but the term is used [more broadly](#) and at one level it could serve in meeting our cultural challenge in areas like reference and access, selection and display, and description.

Knowledge (of oneself and the situation) is always to be valued. But (there’s often a but, isn’t there) some of this is tosh, viz. “other beliefs and values ... are equally valid and valuable”. Must I accept Donald Trump’s beliefs and values as equally valid and valuable as my own? This is the kind of cultural relativism that portrays the death and terror inflicted by Vikings and Mongols in terms of moral equivalence. Conversely, there is moral relativism too in failing to acknowledge the horrors of colonialism or the crimes of Governments today (U.S. in Iraq and Australia in East Timor). Adjusting Australian history to take account of the Aboriginal experience is not about subscribing to an alternative worldview (though it may be prompted by that). It is about abjuring relativism and correcting error. I am still surprised when those deploring bias upbraid objectivity, as if there is any other basis for detecting it.

The underlying theme seems to be that cultural competence supports sympathetic and positive inter-personal dealings based on acceptance of differences. That is not dissimilar to what underlies the challenge to us as curators and guardians of memory to engage with difference. But our role goes beyond inter-personal dealings, does it not? We also deal in objectivity and truth (not just objectivity in dealing with our own subconscious but also in



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dealing with reality outside ourselves). And this objectivity sometimes leads us to disagreeable conclusions and to inconvenient truths. In our search for those inconvenient truths, it is sometimes necessary to reject the idea that all views and values are “equally valid and valuable”.

<<[Michael Piggott: ... in a recent issue of Archival Science, referencing Kirsten Thorpe's research, Sue McKemmish and seven co-authors point to: "the central role of Country in the management of records and stories ... They are “living archives” transmitted and accessed through storytelling and performance ... I suspect most archivists pay this thinking mere lip service. If we truly agree ... what are the implications, the logical next steps, the alternative world views which needs embracing? ... what about hugely significant Indigenous cultural sites? Not "in scope"? >>](#)

### 2020, September 26:

How do we decide what is “in scope”? In my view (not shared by all) we follow the evidence and not a theory in order to get there. Above all, we archivists locate truth in particularities not in generalities, truths that are derived from observation rather than idealisation. We follow the compass and not the map. And then, in ways mysterious and wondrous to behold, the particularity - when properly contextualised - reaches out into a richer and broader understanding of reality than can ever be obtained by adhering to a line of interpretation derived from ideological preconceptions.

I first learned that *Benito Cereno* was based on actual events when I assigned the novella for a seminar I taught on American Exceptionalism. That class explored the ways an idea usually thought of exclusively in terms of the United States – that America had a providential mission, a manifest destiny, to lead humanity to a new dawn – was actually held by all the New World republics. I began to research the history behind *Benito Cereno*, thinking that a book that focused narrowly on the rebellion and ruse could nicely illustrate the role slavery played in such self-understandings. But the more I tried to figure out what happened on board the *Tryal*, and the more I tried to uncover the motives of those involved ... the more convinced I became that it would be impossible to tell the story – or, rather, impossible to convey the meaning of the story – without presenting its larger context. I kept getting pulled further afield, into realms of human activity and belief not immediately associated with slavery, into, for instance, piracy, sealing, and Islam. That’s the thing about American slavery; it never was just about slavery ... The different routes that led all those involved in the drama to the Pacific reveal the fullness of the paradox of freedom and slavery in America, so pervasive it could trap not just slaves and slavers but men who thought they were neither. Greg Grandin [\*The Empire of Necessity\*](#)

### 2020, October 2:

What makes cultural misappropriation (theft) different to common or garden larceny? Napoleon and Hitler were responsible for the theft or attempted theft of thousands of cultural objects, some of which now reside in museums maintained by the heirs of the plunderers (e.g. [The Louvre](#)). Once the dust has settled, people seems fairly relaxed over leaving stuff pillaged from institutions where it is but less so about artefacts stolen from individuals (viz. [looted Jewish property](#) from WW2). But different attitudes seem to be applied now to artefacts in state-owned institutions (less so in private collections) with different ethnic or cultural backgrounds to the victims. Hence the idea of cultural “repatriation” as distinct from restitution – since many of the objects in dispute cannot be demonstrably shown to have been stolen and in some cases (e.g. Egyptian mummies) restitution of cultural rights rather than property rights is the only coherent basis for action. Activists in France are [on trial](#) for trying to do something about it.

Five activists have gone on trial in Paris for trying to remove a funeral staff from France’s pre-eminent indigenous art museum as part of a campaign to pressure the



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government into restituting items they claim were stolen. Emery Mwazulu Diyabanza, 41, led the operation at the Quai Branly museum last June, condemning “the pillage of Africa” ... “We had no intention of stealing this work, but we will continue as long as the injustice of pillaging Africa has not been remedied,” Diyabanza told AFP ahead of the trial ... Diyabanza himself sued the French state after his arrest in June, accusing it of “theft and receiving stolen goods” in amassing a huge collection of native artworks beginning in the colonial era. However the presiding judge told the court: “We are here to judge an infringement, not to judge history.”

... French officials condemned the stunt, which followed president Emmanuel Macron pledge, shortly after his election in May 2017, to look at the [restitution of African cultural treasures](#). France has since returned a ceremonial sword to Senegal and promised to return 26 dozen works to Benin – including a royal throne – that were seized by French troops in the late 19th century .... An expert report commissioned by Macron in 2018 counted some 90,000 African works in French museums, but suggested a “circulation” of some works between museums rather than an outright return, saying not all were pillaged or stolen. “Macron has acknowledged the pillaging, but he’s the one who decides how many works are returned, and whether or not there should be a property transfer – it’s an insult for us,” Diyabanza said.

How confusing! There’s poor old Macron burbling on about property transfer whereas the activists (no doubt) would say they want to restore cultural rights – not property rights. And what about stuff that was gifted but people now challenge the legitimacy of that. Isn’t that an issue with [Strehlow](#)?

The issue of repatriation of archives from colonial powers is lively (especially when the former colonies didn't have the same jurisdictional boundaries as the independent nations that succeeded them. And repatriation isn't new - the [Vatican had to struggle](#) to get its archives back after the Napoleonic Wars.



[Quai Branly museum](#)



[Strehlow Research Centre](#)

**2020, October 6:**

<<[Andrew Waugh](#): ... I'm struggling to see what the problem with this is. A large reason for archival documentation is so that the users can judge what the records are telling them ... How much more important is this context in a museum setting? In a museum the objects in a collection are individually selected from a humongously large pool of potential objects. I would consider the reasons a collector collected a specific object to be consequently very important ... (I remembered to finish this draft when reading this [opinion piece](#) where Tristram Hunt essentially asks the same question and answers it using, IMHO, strawman arguments.)>>

<<CH: What is interesting here (for me) is that they are turning the display inside out. Instead of adopting a scholarly, objective tone – presenting the artefacts (possibly fallaciously) for informative purposes – they are turning the spotlight onto the ethics and integrity of curatorial practice and putting that on display. How far should curators go in contextualising curation itself for our users? How far should





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**apprehended bias on the part of the curator be acknowledged and whose apprehension should be preferred? When do legitimate doubts about our own prejudices begin to undermine confidence in our ability to discern the truth?>>**

**<<AW: I'm struggling to see what the problem with this is ... I would consider the reasons a collector collected a specific object to be consequently very important in understanding what the object is and what it represents.>>**

### **Coming Clean (no problem):**

IMHO custodians of memory – archivists, curators, librarians – need to be aware of their own motives and possible biases. They need to overcome their biases as far as possible and strive for objectivity, knowing they will never wholly succeed. I see no problem in disclosing our assumptions, practices, and motives (to the extent that we can objectively discern them). Nor do I see a problem in disclosing our own struggle, our own doubts and uncertainties. As to the perils of collection, I have long argued that archivists too have a special (and much neglected) duty to say much, much more in the finding aids about the appraisal process that led to the formation of the archives that the user sees. I have told the story before how, when I was on assignment at PROUK (now National Archives), an archivist there said to me that they didn't keep control records (registers and indexes) because they didn't want the public knowing what had been destroyed.

### **Curatorial Tone (bit of a problem):**

I don't think we've yet found our "curatorial voice" in the postmodern age. Adopting a curatorial tone of impartiality, based at least on an aspiration to be impartial, was once deemed to be a virtue. Custodians don't tamper with the records. They are inviolate in our hands and can be relied on to the extent that our integrity can be relied upon to ensure the "preservation of the chain of evidence". The belief that we can be trusted is an important tool in our box. The tone we adopt to uphold that belief sustains the trust of our clients in us (or so we would like to believe). Of course, nowadays, we understand about subconscious bias and that the archivist's own actions mean we are -makers as well as -keepers of records. Acknowledging that while at the same time establishing a basis on which to claim professional integrity (supposing you think that is a valuable quality to have or at least to portray) is, therefore, a bit of a problem.

### **Apprehended Bias (quite a problem):**

Add to all that the pressures now bearing down as a result of culture wars. The very idea of impartiality is scoffed at. Identity bias (racial, social, cultural, religious, ideological, etc.) is assumed. Apology or correction is demanded. The question is: how does the custodian deal with it? To what extent should our presentation acknowledge apprehended bias that we do not believe we have? Should we acknowledge it, yield to it, succumb to it, or combat it? How we would go about any of these alternative responses is a whole other discussion. And then, how do custodians keep their responses (whichever ones we choose) in proportion? Should we take account of the most deserving alternative views or the loudest? The culture wars evolve and move on. What is admired today is condemned tomorrow and (more subtly) what is ignored today becomes a hot issue tomorrow. If we must keep on adjusting to changing perceptions (which I don't say we shouldn't) how do we balance the integrity of our own interpretations against the interpretations that others would have us make.

Adjusting our practices to satisfy the ideas of others, rather upholding the integrity of our own, could be seen as falsification of the evidence no better than forgery. Acknowledging other ideas while defending our own is one thing. Subscribing to contested ideas in the culture wars makes us culture warriors – the object of disdain to one or more parties. It would be nice to think (As we once did) that we can curate without interpretation – but we can't. My question therefore comes down to this:



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how can the archivist or the collector contextualise themselves in terms other than their own to disclose their “understanding [of] what the object is and what it represents” or even comprehend fully “the reasons a collector collected a specific object” except by asserting what they believe to be true and what acknowledgement should be made of understanding they believe to be false?

It was all so much easier when science, medicine, and professional expertise of all kinds weren’t being denounced in the Age of Post-Truth. Ah, well!

**2020, October 7:**

Some of the issues we have been discussing in this tread are interwoven into the theme of a Canadian conference to be held next year. **Date:** May 27-29, 2021

**Location:** Edmonton, Alberta (online if necessary)

### **Conference Theme – Archives in Interesting Times**

We are witnessing turmoil around the globe, including a pandemic, economic struggle, climate change and the Black Lives Matter protests. Archives are not isolated from what is happening and there has been much stress to archives as a result. Our profession is challenged by funding cuts which are especially prominent in our oil and gas-based economy in Alberta. The pandemic has also contributed to a lack of revenue, but of significant note, the pandemic has changed our work. In addition, we are still seeing natural disasters affecting our facilities as climate change is increasingly becoming an issue. There has been a rise in the outcry against social injustices which has made archives re-examine their colonial-based policies in hopes for new policies that are more inclusive. Our holdings bear witness to some of these social injustices. Keeping in mind the tornado of events that are changing our professional life, ASA’s 2021 Conference looks at our profession in interesting times. We welcome proposals that could include but are not limited to topics such as:

- Changes in archival policy over the years in Canada and Alberta
- Particular phenomena to which archives lend perspective (e.g. COVID-19 and the Spanish Flu)
- Resiliency in Archives
- Emotional labour within the archival profession
- Building partnerships with other organizations
- Community engagement
- Sharp contraction in funding (cuts or reallocation in funding)
- People retiring and not being replaced (lack of succession planning and funding going to other areas of operations)
- Waning and waxing of support for archives within organizations
  - Funding
  - Advocacy work
  - Promotion
- Natural disasters
- Change in public perception by the public and their use of archives
  - Impacts of increased advocacy and social media presence
  - Increase in communities’ need for archives and therefore a larger market for them opening up
- Changing technology – though this is always something archives are managing, what are these interesting times now allowing?
- What are the benefits and challenges that these interesting times and working from home or decreased public in the reading room provided to the field?
  - Projects on the backburner have been brought forward due to working from home
  - How has working from home changed the focus of work?
  - Changing nature of work



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We are interested in reflecting upon how archives have changed during challenging circumstances and societal trends as well as how archives have provided context for these issues.

**2020, October 27:**

Back to statuary for a moment, Mary Beard (academic tv presenter on Roman history) gives [her views](#).



**Mary Beard**



**Geta Cancelled**

The Romans had many ways of dealing with the statues of those they no longer wanted to honour. Some they (or their enemies) destroyed ... But the Romans were much more imaginative than that. It was common practice to give a makeover to a marble head and to change the image of one emperor you didn't like into that one you did (or, to put it another way, to save money by recycling the old guy into the new). And occasionally you could even change one god into another just by changing the statue's label.

So where does this leave us in our current statue wars? Let me offer just a few observations.

1. There is no one (or almost no one) who thinks that there are no exclusions at all for statues that belong in the public realm. There would, I imagine, be very little public debate about the taking down of a statue of Goebbels or Jimmy Savile ... but we disagree on where we draw the line ....
2. It goes without saying that one can deplore the actions of the person portrayed in the statue, while not wanting to remove the object itself from public view ...
3. Too much of this debate has traded on a view of history that divides it into goodies and baddies ...
4. Much of this comes down to our understanding of the function of public statuary, and I hope that, when Sadiq Khan's new commission to look at the diversity of London's statuary (and more) gets under way, they will consider not just who is worthy to be commemorated, but what public sculpture is *for* ...
5. And as a parting shot, I bridle a little at the repeated suggestions that these statues belong in a museum ...

How wrong can you get?

**(Me speaking now)**

Totally agree with no.5. Meanwhile, I have always been amused by two statues in central London. One is of [Oliver Cromwell outside Parliament](#). Why would anyone want to put it *there*? He's the only man who ever shut the place down. The other is nearby: [Boudicca stands triumphant](#) in her chariot, looking out over the Thames! Isn't she the one who burnt





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Londinium to the ground and brutally slaughtered everyone in sight? There's also one of her in Colchester apparently. Even curiouser.



Oliver Cromwell



Boudicca

<<Michael Piggott: Our governments don't erect statues anymore, nor unlike Sadiq Khan in London, do they establish commissions to check existing statues' diversity. Nor do our cultural institutions usually chose exhibition themes as challenging and politically pointed as say the BL's Windrush: Songs in a Strange Land. But here in Canberra anyway, they're pretty quick to tell cultural intuitions to keep it vanilla. Last week the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister told the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House to stop generating discussion about the status of Australian democracy as if it were a thinktank (see "Morton's message to MOAD: stop doubting democracy", Canberra Times, 25 October 2020, pp 1, 6). Another quote: the Minister said "you should go to the Museum ... to be educated, inspired and engaged", and visitors "should leave with a greater appreciation of and affection to [sic] Australian democratic systems, which we should be all proud of". Meanwhile our public broadcaster continues to annoy ministers for its presumed political bias, .... and to have its annual budget cut. It's Media Watch program ran a fascinating item on the state of Australian democracy during the week called Clive's death tax, which concluded "there's no national law that demands political advertising be factual - although South Australia and the ACT do have some rules. And we're unlikely to see one in the future". I felt inspired and proud.>>

**2020, November 7:**

### Impartiality vs Objectivity; Balance vs Opinion

Where were you when a US president stood up and claimed his own country's election was corrupt – and media organisations simply cut him off because he had no evidence for any of his mad, rambling allegations? ... while there is no question that Trump's comments and indeed behaviour over much of the four years should have been called out long ago, there are still huge questions over journalists' relationships to neutrality and balance – and how time-stretched journalists can get this wrong ... true impartiality allows reporters to say that politicians are lying if there are facts and evidence to prove it. Such calls are essential not just for democracy but the future of journalism, even if a combination of financial, political and technological pressure has made them harder ... While US broadcasters are being celebrated, though, it seems wise to consider what the consequence of an increasingly opinionated journalism could be. Surely the endgame is Trump TV ... For Trump, said to be confused and upset by the loss of his biggest cheerleader in Murdoch, his own channel would be the perfect answer. In the UK, we have GB News and the proposed new Murdoch TV channel to look forward to.



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Newly licensed ventures have seen how LBC has challenged the UK's public service television impartiality requirements by showing political balance across the whole day rather than one opinion or show at a time. This is akin to the US model where for every CNN for those who have hated Trump for years, there is a Fox News host slavishly promoting his every view. Given this, it would be wise if all those in the UK pumped by the passion and enthusiasm they can see on US TV reports and exasperated by an overly cautious BBC are careful what they wish for. Populist media, like populist politics, can be a dangerous game.

Substitute *collecting* for *reporting* and *culture wars* for *populism* and where does that leave us? An anti-slavery museum "balanced" by one celebrating colonialism perhaps?

**2020, November 15:**

### Conflicted Memories

Whereas Remembrance Day in Britain prompts a united sense of national pride in military service, and respect for the sacrifices of those who fought in both world wars, Germany's commemoration of the war dead is much more cautious and complex. Military service in 20th Century Germany is associated with profound shame - focused above all on the victims of Nazi military aggression and the Holocaust. Reinforcing that is a belief that the ground for Germany's Nazi catastrophe was laid by the militarism of the Prussian state that unified the country in the 19th Century and led it into World War One. It was this militaristic state that built the Neue Wache or "new guardhouse", a classical building on the famous central Berlin street of Unter den Linden, which is now at the heart of the annual day of mourning.



Built in 1818, it was originally intended to celebrate the success of war in building national identity by liberating Germany from Napoleonic rule. And later military triumphs - especially over France in 1871 - were crucial landmarks as Prussia and Germany became a great European power ... An annual day of national mourning - the Volkstrauertag - was first held in the 1920s. And there was discussion about creating a place of national memory similar to the Cenotaph in London. But the re-opening of the Neue Wache as a "Memorial Site for the Fallen of the World War" in 1931 revealed sharp divisions within German society ... After the Nazis took power in 1933 they replaced the day of mourning with a day of commemoration of heroes, the Heldengedenktage. The Neue Wache was now used for their glorification of war - an echo of Prussian militarism in a new fascist style.

Twelve years later ... with the Neue Wache now located in Soviet-occupied Germany ... it was described as a memorial to the "victims of fascism" ... After the GDR collapsed in 1989 and Germany reunified, the Neue Wache was changed once again, finally taking on the form and purpose that it has today. This time the focus was on a sculpture from the 1930s by the artist Käthe Kollwitz installed in one of the building's chambers, depicting a woman holding a dead child. Her sculpture was seen as finally turning attention away from military memory towards all the victims of war and tyranny ... Kollwitz's sculpture is meant to





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represent not only a mother's grief at the loss of her soldier son but also all those non-soldiers caught up in the horrors of war - especially Holocaust victims but also less well-known sufferers, such as the German women who suffered mass sexual violence at the end of WW2.

Modern debate about the Neue Wache has also involved another question - whether as part of the restoration of Berlin's Prussia-era architecture, its statues of famous generals should be restored to their original positions in or near the building. And that is part of a larger problem. Where does modern emphasis on remembering the victims of war leave the memory and reputation of those who served in the German armed forces?

... Remembering soldiers lost in WW2 has been especially sensitive ... These lost soldiers could not be commemorated in public as heroes, as the German military were more and more associated with the brutal conquests and war crimes committed by the Nazi regime ... It was widely claimed that Nazi war crimes had been committed by the SS and other elite units, while the mainstream Wehrmacht army had - like most of the German population - remained ignorant of and uninvolved in the Holocaust ... But then a 1990s travelling exhibition called The Crimes of the Wehrmacht showed how the army had often been complicit in atrocities. This challenged the myth of the "clean Wehrmacht" ... Today's Germany has tiptoed only very slowly towards becoming a more "normal" military power, with the Bundeswehr deployed abroad ...

The charity responsible for German war graves, the Volksbund, founded in 1919, still organises many of Germany's commemorations of the war dead including the national day of mourning. Since the end of the Cold War its work has also included the highly sensitive task of recovering soldiers' remains and maintaining German military cemeteries in parts of Central and Eastern Europe where the most terrible Nazi crimes were committed. The Volksbund stresses what it sees as its educational role ... Individual grief at the loss of family members, including millions of soldiers, is real enough. But the memory of the vast numbers of other victims of Germany's wars will always be present too.

**PS.** And here in Australia, there is conflict of sorts over whether or not AWM should do something about "frontier wars". The official position appears to be "As defined in the Australian War Memorial Act 1980, the Memorial's official role is to develop a memorial for Australians who have died on, or as a result of, active service, or as a result of any war or warlike operation in which Australians have been on active service. The definition does not include internal conflicts between the Indigenous populations and the colonial powers of the day."



**<<Alan Ventress: I thoroughly agree with this analysis of conflicted memories. Cautious and complex sums it up. I lived in Hameln an der Weser for 3 years between 1968 and 1971 as part of the British Army's contribution to NATO as a corporal in the Royal Military Police. What memorials there were to the fallen were subdued and almost hidden from view. I particularly recall one such memorial on a hill overlooking the town commemorating 3 soldiers who died, i quote, for the whole of Germany in April 1945. Another memorial at a mass grave for slave labourers on the outskirts of the town was unknown to the locals and many did not want to know about the sins of**





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the Nazis. The exception being some senior officers in the German police who were proud of their service in the SS and not at all contrite.>>

<<Andrew Waugh: PS. And here in Australia, there is conflict of sorts over whether or not AWM should do something about "frontier wars". The official position appears to be "As defined in the Australian War Memorial Act 1980, the Memorial's official role is to develop a memorial for Australians who have died on, or as a result of, active service, or as a result of any war or warlike operation in which Australians have been on active service. The definition does not include internal conflicts between the Indigenous populations and the colonial powers of the day." Semantic nonsense, of course. If they wanted to they could just as easily argue that this definition includes the deaths of indigenous people defending their country from invasion. I would assume, under this definition, the dead of the Boer war prior to federation are not memorialised in the AWM. They could not have been Australians as Australia did not exist. If the AWM does include the Boer war dead, then they must be retrospectively including people who, today, would be counted as 'Australians'. In which case, the death of the indigenous people would be included as "Australians who have died... as a result of any war or warlike operation in which Australians have been on active service." Unless, of course, this argument is a version of 'terra nullus'. Deaths of indigenous people during the invasion don't count as they did not have a 'country' or a 'government' to define them as being on active service.>>

<<Joanna Sassoon: Never forget that Britain's role in shaping remembrance is also complex and cautious ... It was only in 2012 that the British erected a national memorial to those who served in Bomber Command and this was preceded by a long period of preferring to forget rather than choosing to remember.



**Bomber Command Memorial**



**Bomber Harris**

This official trying to forget continues with Bomber Command and other casualty records from WW2 remaining restricted, housed in the iron grip of the MoD although being transferred to the UK National Archives at a glacial pace after being vetted and currently inaccessible even for children of the deceased ... This is in contrast to Australia's view on access to WW2 records and the millions currently being spent digitising them and making them freely available ... so, it remains in the imperial balance between forgetting and remembering, your main hope in trying to work out what happened to your deceased military relative in Britain is that they went down with an Australian, as a carbon copy of reports that are restricted to British eyes is often on deceased Australian's files. Such is life.>>

<<a memorial for Australians who have died on, or as a result of, active service>>

I assume the 1980 Act makes statutory provision for defining "Australians" for the purpose of memorialisation, but until 1948 (at least) such a concept was itself cautious and conflicted in such a way that soldiers from Australia actually fought during the two world wars as British subjects. According to [Wikipedia](#) –



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Until the passing in Australia of the *Nationality Act 1920*, Australia's nationality law, like that of other [Commonwealth countries](#), was governed by the English common law concept of a [British subject](#) ... The idea that there was such a thing as an Australian legal nationality, as distinct from a British one, was considered by the High Court of Australia in 1906 to be a "novel idea" to which it was "not disposed to give any countenance". That was as a matter of law, but in 1913 and 1930 Australian journalists considered that there were such things as Australian nationality and citizenship. The [British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act 1914](#), an act of the Westminster parliament, codified the common law rules. Australia followed this with the enacting of the *Nationality Act 1920*, which came into effect on 1 January 1921 and codified the concept of a British subject in Australia. In general, the principles of the 1920 Act and subsequent amendments followed United Kingdom legislation, although there were some differences that could lead to a person being a *British subject* solely under Australian law. The 1948 [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#) decided ... that the United Kingdom and the self-governing dominions would each adopt a separate national citizenship, while retaining the common status of British subject ...

Of course, Aborigines (and Torres Strait Islanders) didn't become Australian citizens until after the 1967 Referendum. Whether or not they were "Australians" before that is a more vexed question. But I think I am correct that Aboriginal soldiers served in both World Wars.

The British [memory of the terror bombing](#) of Germany in WW2, referred to by Joanna, is a superb example of conflicted memory. American recollections do not (apparently) travel in parallel - possibly revealing cultural differences. Some Americans are more ambivalent, however, over use of the A Bomb. The picture is further complicated by the participation of significant numbers of Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders in the British bombing offensive. So, this is our issue also.

Relative to most other European countries the United Kingdom enjoys a secure, positive memory of World War 2. At its simplest, the narrative goes: the Germans started it and the British, with their allies, won. However damaging to British relations with other European states since 1945, this account has proved remarkably durable. Not for the British the 'divided memory' of Italy or the Vichy syndrome of France or the 'historians' dispute' of Germany; Britain's dominant memories of World War 2 are unified, straightforward, and patriotic. Within this serene landscape, the combined bombing offensive against Germany, and specifically the part played by Bomber Command of the Royal Air Force (RAF), form an exception. Memories of Bomber Command are unusual in being both complex and volatile. They are complex because they concern inherently difficult questions – the effectiveness and the morality of strategic bombing in World War 2 – and because they have involved different 'levels' of memory – the official, the academic, the popular, the local – rather differently. A cohesive national myth of the bombing campaign, comparable (for example) to the British myth of the Blitz, the German bombing of British cities in 1940-1941, is impossible. Memories of the bombing offensive, moreover, are volatile because they have shown significant variance over time ...

The development of British memories of the bombing offensive since 1945 can be set roughly into three periods: relative quietism from the war until the early 1960s; two decades of scepticism from then until the early 1980s; and, since then, the slow growth of acceptance and memorialisation. However, these divisions are approximate and ragged, and, because memory operates at so many different levels, they are far from uniform ...

Official distance from the offensive is also reflected in policies of memorialisation. Battle of Britain Day, on 15 September, celebrates Fighter Command's achievement in blocking the Luftwaffe's offensive against the RAF; there is no Bomber Command equivalent. Public money financed neither the statue of Harris, unveiled in 1992, nor the Bomber Command memorial opened in Green Park, London twenty years later. Official reluctance to celebrate the bombing offensive may be explained by the distaste referred to by Frankland, and by the perceived need for good relations with the Federal Republic of Germany within the context of the Cold War and, from 1961, of Britain's rapprochement with Europe. Hostile reactions in Cologne and other German cities to the unveiling of the Harris statue suggested that despite the involvement of the Royal Family in the opening ceremonies, governments



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had every reason to keep them at arm's length. 'Forgetting', the title of the final chapter of Patrick Bishop's popular history *Bomber Boys*, therefore appears accurate in relation to government. Not so in the culture of schoolboys. They were treated, in the comics of the postwar generation and in the cheap and accurate plastic kits on sale from the 1950s, to a continuous celebration of World War 2 in which the bombing war played a prominent part ...

The bombing war has remained the most contentious aspect of Britain's World War 2 record, but not because it was 'forgotten', an expression better reserved for much of the war in the Far East. It has been contentious above all because of the gulf between the exceptional courage of the young men who served in Bomber Command and the horror that they inflicted on the German civilian population. To celebrate the bravery of the aircrew is to belittle the suffering of the civilians who died; to state clearly that the bombing offensive violated the laws and norms by which civilised human beings wage war diminishes the courage of the aircrew. The extraordinary difficulty of straddling this gulf explains the unease even of some of the aircrew themselves. The difficulties are compounded, as Süß observes, if the international context is taken into account. Germans seeking to promote a sense of national victimhood have seized on the Official History and the more sceptical British accounts. And the efforts at reconciliation coming from British churches run the risk of establishing a moral equivalence between the two belligerents ...

**2020, November 16:**

<<Michael Piggott: Good point re American ambivalence Chris, an excellent instance being the Enola Gay case: *Enola Gay* became the center of a controversy at the Smithsonian Institution when the museum planned to put its fuselage on public display in 1995 as part of an exhibit commemorating the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.<sup>[41]</sup> The exhibit, *The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb and the Cold War*, was drafted by the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum staff, and arranged around the restored *Enola Gay*.<sup>[42]</sup> Critics of the planned exhibit, especially those of the American Legion and the Air Force Association, charged that the exhibit focused too much attention on the Japanese casualties inflicted by the nuclear bomb, rather than on the motives for the bombing or the discussion of the bomb's role in ending the conflict with Japan.<sup>[43][44]</sup> The exhibit brought to national attention many long-standing academic and political issues related to retrospective views of the bombings. After attempts to revise the exhibit to meet the satisfaction of competing interest groups, the exhibit was canceled on 30 January 1995. Martin O. Harwit, Director of the National Air and Space Museum, was compelled to resign over the controversy.



And there's much more to say about the War Memorial and 'frontier wars' commemoration, including the fundamental pre-requisite of Indigenous community consultation before the Memorial decides to reverse its current interpretation of its Act, but, for the moment, don't forget the Aboriginal Memorial at the National Gallery: The Aboriginal Memorial is an installation of 200 hollow log coffins from Central





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**Arnhem Land. It commemorates all the indigenous people who, since 1788, have lost their lives defending their land.>>**

**2021, February 12:**

A useful reflection on the nature of the memory of colonialism. Positing that:

The complex events we recall and commemorate during this time are integral to the story that has shaped our nations, in all their diversity. They are, however, events to be remembered and understood, respecting the fact that different perspectives exist. In doing this, we can facilitate a more authentic interpretation ... This journey of ethical remembering [allows] us to examine the nature of commemoration itself and how it might unburden us of history's capacity to create obstacles to a better, shared future ... I have given the title Machnamh 100 to a series of reflections which examine the period 1920-1923, including the war of independence, civil war and partition. "Machnamh" is an Irish word encompassing reflection, contemplation, meditation and thought ...

I love the phrase "history's capacity to create obstacles". The author (currently President of Eire and identified as the President of Ireland) argues:

In my work on commemoration, memory, forgetting and forgiving I have sought to establish a discourse characterised by what the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney calls "a hospitality of narratives", acknowledging that different, informed perspectives on the same events can and do exist. The acceptance of this fact can release us from the pressure of finding, or subscribing to, a singular unifying narrative of the past.

As ever, a reflective study (of the context of anything) spills over into ever-expanding vistas:

It may be fruitful to consider the relationship of what has been titled – and not without dissent – the "European Enlightenment" within the project of imperial expansion for an understanding of how the mask of modernity has been used for cultural suppression, economic exploitation, dispossession and domination ... Those on the receiving end of imperialist adventurism were denied cultural agency, assumed to be incapable of it, and responsible for violence towards the "modernising" forces directed at them ... What our current reflection consists of, I suggest, is not the offering of a set of competing rationalisations for different kinds of violence. Instead it is about understanding the contexts in which they occurred ...

Back in the 1970s while I was studying in London, it seemed (to my limited colonial understanding) that prospects for the reflective study of imperial history were promising and available sources plentiful. But, as the article points out, there is:

... a disinclination in both academic and journalistic accounts to critique empire and imperialism ... a reluctance in former imperial powers to engage now with their imperialist past and to examine that past with descendants of those previously colonised, many of whom still live with the complex legacies of that colonialism ...

In any case, the entire question of discovering and shaping a contextual understanding of the (re)sources to support such a study, other than those left by the imperialists themselves, remains open.

**PS.** Just finding the right word is, of course, part of the problem. This author describes the 1916-1921 period in Ireland as a "War of Independence" – not a term everyone would use. On my shelves, books about the 1642-1660 period in Britain and Ireland refer to it variously as "The Great Rebellion" (following Clarendon), "The Great Civil War" (following Gardiner), or "The Century of Revolution" (following Hill) and many of the lesser authors (who seldom use the word "Great") are confused about whether it was an English event, a British event, or a British/Irish event.



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**PPS.** “Ireland” is the English language form of “Eire” (without the accents). It could be said to be proper usage in an English language newspaper if one disregards the many respectful uses of indigenous language by English speakers around the world (not least by Australians and New Zealanders).

**2021, February 22:**

.. and speaking of truth, statues, and such, consider these gems –

### Gavrilo Princip

... Princip is portrayed in the history books of the various countries of former Yugoslavia either as a terrorist or as a rebel with a cause – reflecting contemporary divisions in a region still recovering from the more recent conflicts of the 1990s. While they were part of Yugoslavia, children in all these countries were taught the same history. Now they all have their own versions of the truth, shaped by the more recent wars, and are passing it on to the next generation ... In ethnically divided Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is [now] no commonly held view either about Princip or about the origins of the first world war ...

These divisions are also reflected in the rival commemorations that will be held in Bosnia. A series of events will be held in Sarajevo, including exhibitions, concerts and a meeting of young peace activists from around the world. Bosnian Serbs will hold their own events in the eastern town of Visegrad, organised by film director Emir Kusturica, while a statue of Princip is due to be erected in Serb-run eastern Sarajevo ...



**Gavrilo Princip Statue**



**Violet Gibson**

### Violet Gibson

On 7 April 1926 an Irish woman stepped out from a crowd in Rome and fired a shot at one of the 20th century's most infamous dictators. One bullet grazed the nose of Benito Mussolini, but the Italian leader survived the assassination attempt .... Now, nearly a century later, moves to put up a plaque in Dublin are gathering pace .... After some time in an Italian prison, she was deported to England ... She was subsequently kept in St Andrew's Hospital, a mental asylum in Northampton, until her death in 1956. In the days following the attempted assassination, the President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State W.T. Cosgrave, wrote to Mussolini to congratulate him on his survival ...

Dublin City Council has now passed a motion which has given initial approval to put up a plaque dedicated to her in the city ... "It suited both the British authorities and her family to have her seen as 'insane' rather than as political," the motion [states] ....

### “Stern Gang”

**Lehi** ... was a Zionist paramilitary organization ... that used terrorist means in its actions. Its avowed aim was to evict the British authorities from Palestine by resort to force, allowing unrestricted immigration of Jews and the formation of a Jewish state, a "new totalitarian Hebrew republic" ... Lehi and the Irgun were jointly responsible for the massacre in Deir Yassin. Lehi assassinated Lord Moyne, British Minister Resident in the Middle East, and made many other attacks on the British in Palestine. On 29 May 1948, the government of Israel, having inducted its activist members into the Israel Defense Forces, formally disbanded Lehi, though some of its members carried out one more terrorist act, the



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assassination of [Folke Bernadotte](#) some months later ... After the assassination, the new Israeli government declared Lehi a terrorist organization, arresting some 200 members and convicting some of the leaders. Just before the first Israeli elections in January 1949, a general amnesty to Lehi members was granted by the government.

In 1980, Israel instituted a military decoration, an "award for activity in the struggle for the establishment of Israel", the Lehi ribbon. Former Lehi leader [Yitzhak Shamir](#) became Prime Minister of Israel in 1983.



**Lehi Memorial**



**Ghengis Khan Memorial**

### **Ghengis Khan (1)**

... Genghis Khan had been revered for centuries by Mongols and certain other ethnic groups such as Turks ... In 1962, the erection of a monument at his birthplace and a conference held in commemoration of his 800th birthday led to criticism from the Soviet Union and the dismissal of secretary Tömör-Ochir of the ruling [Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee](#). In the early 1990s, the memory of Genghis Khan underwent a powerful revival, partly in reaction to its suppression during the [Mongolian People's Republic](#) period ... In Mongolia today, Genghis Khan's name and likeness appear on products, streets, buildings, and other places. His face can be found on everyday commodities, from liquor bottles to candy, and on the largest denominations ... Major Genghis Khan statues stand before the parliament ... There have been repeated discussions about regulating the use of his name and image to avoid trivialization ... As of 2012, [Mongolian President] Elbegdorj issued a decree establishing Genghis Khan's birthday as a national holiday ... In Inner Mongolia there are a monument and buildings dedicated to him ...

The conquests and leadership of Genghis Khan included widespread devastation and mass murder, and he, along with the Mongols in general, perpetrated what has been called ethnocide and genocide ... Iranian historians from the time of Mongol occupation, describe the Mongol invasions as an catastrophe never before seen. A number of present-day Iranian historians ... have likewise viewed the period initiated by Genghis Khan as a uniquely catastrophic era. Steven R. Ward writes that the Mongol violence and depredations in the Iranian Plateau "killed up to three-fourths of the population... possibly 10 to 15 million people. Some historians have estimated that Iran's population did not again reach its pre-Mongol levels until the mid-20th century." .../

**cf.** Alexander the Great, Atilla the Hun, Charlemagne, Tamerlane, Francisco Pizarro, Napoleon, Shaka, etc. – conquerors all.

### **Ghengis Khan (2)**

A French museum has postponed an exhibit about the Mongol emperor Genghis Khan citing interference by the Chinese government, which it accuses of trying to rewrite history .... The museum's director, Bertrand Guillet, said: "We made the decision to stop this production in the name of the human, scientific and ethical values that we defend." It said the Chinese authorities demanded that certain words, including "Genghis Khan," "Empire" and "Mongol" be taken out of the show. Subsequently they asked for power over exhibition brochures,





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legends and maps .... The museum branded it “censorship” and said it underlined a “hardening ... of the position of the Chinese government against the Mongolian minority” ...

**2021. February 23:**

### **... and on it goes**

Moscow will this week vote on whether to reinstate a statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Soviet security services, on the spot from which it was torn down during the collapse of the USSR. The monument to Dzerzhinsky, an architect of the Bolsheviks' murderous Red Terror, dominated the square outside the headquarters of the Soviet KGB, now the FSB, in central Moscow until 1991. Crowds cheered as it was removed by cranes following a failed coup. Since then, the statue has been on display at an outdoor “museum” of Soviet monuments, including busts of Lenin, Stalin and Brezhnev, in a park in the Russian capital.

But Moscow authorities announced they would reconsider the fate of the “Iron Felix” monument with an online vote ... Police meanwhile cleared a memorial to opposition leader Boris Nemtsov from a bridge where it has stood since his murder in 2015, reportedly over fears that supporters of Navalny could rally there. Eight people who had come to lay flowers there were arrested.

**<<Michael Piggott: This widening survey is inching towards mention of a regime that, for example, knows exactly what to do with people taking an unhealthy interest in the, ahem, "June Fourth Incident" and how to correct museum labels and certainly knows how to encourage Chris back onto the right path for his unsound comment at the end of his last most interesting post, viz: "No doubt such musings would be seen as a veiled power play." Meanwhile, the Australian Opposition Leader - yes Virginia, we have an Opposition Leader - gives a speech at the War Memorial.**

His written speech for the memorial went further, acknowledging the Indigenous resistance fighters of the frontier, too. But when he spoke at the AWM the critical words about frontier war were (unintentionally, he says) omitted.

**And on it goes.>>**

### **<<how to encourage Chris back onto the right path>>**

I'm unreconstructed.

I know I'm unreconstructed.

I mean to go on being unreconstructed.

I like it.

The Dzerzhinsky affair provides another reason for not consigning disgraced statuary to museums. They might come back! Hadn't thought of that one. The Romans did it better, they had *Damnatio memoriae*.

**2021, February 24:**

### **Things people say**

Australia's peak national library bodies want to see the federal government adopt a policy and strategy for combating misinformation and disinformation among individuals of all ages. The Australian Libraries and Information Association (ALIA), National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA) and National Archives of Australia all spoke of the looming threat of misinformation and information warfare the country was facing at a nationhood committee hearing on Friday morning . ALIA chief executive Sue McKerracher said access to the internet was crucial for the nation but so was a strategy to ensure Australians of all ages were able to read and interpret that information ...

"I'd like to see a recommendation that the federal government work with the Australian Media Literacy Alliance to develop a national policy strategy, a framework and action - a call to action - for media literacy." ... National Archives director-general David Fricker added that his agency, which collects and stores a number of critical government records, played an important role in stamping out misinformation by holding onto records



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that might otherwise be destroyed ... "Only the National Archives ... actually stops people, government officials, from destroying records and without that role, many records would be destroyed before they ever saw the light of day." ... Mr Fricker said those in Parliament could work to support government institutions and experts in order to ensure trust in facts wasn't being eroded ... "[A debate about] whether the Bureau of Meteorology, you know, can be trusted or not, is running at the moment. And I think, I think there is a role for Parliament and a role for government to actually be a bit more supportive of institutions."

Liberal senator and committee chairwoman Amanda Stoker pushed back on Mr Fricker's assertion, stating uncritical acceptance of experts in government institutions wasn't the solution either. "There's something compelling about the alternate argument that says we can't have uncritical acceptance of everything that comes from experts in a government department, simply because that's the title they hold," Senator Stoker said. "There's a balancing exercise."

Senator Stoker asked Ms McKerracher what sort of approach would be needed to tackle misinformation if it were to be adopted as a policy. There were already a number of literacy and educational programs the libraries had in place, such as the Be Connected and Tech Savvy Seniors programs, Ms McKerracher said, but what was missing was a co-ordinated, federal approach ... "What we're looking for is a national kind of guidance for this that then can be divided up between states and territories, but it has that linked, connected ... not people duplicating, overlapping, arguing about the right way to do it. "A real national approach to this."



[Amanda Stoker](#)



[Sue McKerracher](#)

I hadn't realised that what was missing was a co-ordinated federal approach, that governments are motivated by tolerance and the search for Truth, or that they practice what they preach. As to the [June Fourth incident](#) -

tolerance of injustice and distorted information is an act of encouragement and complicity. Such tolerance allows authoritarian regimes to transgress any red lines. This is exactly what happened after "June Fourth", when the west bought into the excuse that Chinese society would [become more democratic](#) after it became richer.

Tolerance and understanding live at the personal level and inform society's values. God forbid that either are ever shaped by the hand of governments. It has to be the other way around. Good governments arise (if at all) from the shared values of their citizens and of the society they govern. Totalitarians believe otherwise. Education to encourage critical thinking (rather than media literacy) – ensuring "*Australians of all ages were able to read and interpret ... information*" – yes, that I can see might be helpful. But when has our teaching ever been about critical thinking and when would parents and ideologues ever permit it to be? And how likely is it that the downtrodden, dispossessed followers of populist



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demagoguery or the critical theory activists inspired by their mission to change the world would take any notice?

**2021, February 26:**

*The Australian Libraries and Information Association (ALIA), National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA) and National Archives of Australia all spoke of the looming threat of misinformation and information warfare ... access to the internet was crucial for the nation but so was a strategy to ensure Australians of all ages were able to read and interpret that information ...*

But what sort of strategy? The State cannot stymie the evil of misinformation and it cannot establish a Ministry of Truth. Information warfare can only be won by boots on the ground in the culture wars. People, not Policy. Culture cannot be planned “because it is also the unconscious background of all planning” (T S Eliot). But I agree that the State can help People to get on their feet (“to read and interpret”) - without having control over where that will lead. A bureaucrat’s nightmare. And “uncritical acceptance of experts in government institutions” wouldn’t be any part of that (where did Senator Stoker get that idea?)

If I ruled the world, [critical thinking](#) would, as I’ve said before, be central to education – not what to think, but how to think. There are [plenty of courses](#) (some good, some lousy) set up to do this. But my starting point would be with language (I think Orwell and Don Watson would agree). Giving students permission to despise weasel words and phrases and the confidence to make judgements – just the mental organ (in the words of Kingsley Amis) that makes you say *This is bloody good* or *This is piss*.

In [The Dragons of Expectation](#), Robert Conquest gives some wonderful examples of the “stupefying” use of English, “grotesque vocabulary held together by a tangled syntax, if such it can be called” –

**Untenable words** taken from “a book about Byron by a Professor of English at a great university”: *behaviourly, factive, reportorial, factiveness, attitudinal, suppositional, contextualised, interiorised, postcivilised, episodically, audience problem, postpubescent, postmythic, iconograph, variant phase*. [I think I could forgive contextualised and episodically.]

**Worthless word conglomerates** identified by Clive James when “reviewing an otherwise deplorable book”: *non-cognitive structural features, universalistic social psychological processes, a cognitive model of ontology, ideational formations*.

**Esoteric language** used in a book about Homer: *Developmentally the Achilles complex is like a running spiral arrested after its first circuit, where, having doubled back upon itself, it dissects itself at a point only slightly in advance of its origin, The Bride transmits her desire to the suitors through a triple network of ‘ciphers’ which are set in a nebulous cloud of ‘blossoming’, and which sort the alphabetic units emitted by a ‘letterbox’, [T]his chapter is devoted to the narrative situation of complex narrator-text or embedded, focalization, NF1 [F2Cx]. There is embedded (or secondary) focalization when the NF1 represents in the narrator-text the focalization of one of the characters.*

These examples are drawn from academic works. Open any newspaper or journal or turn on a radio or TV and enough vulgar instances of reported speech will be supplied to keep a critical thinking course going for many, many months.

Forgive my banging on about this. The COVID Experience is making me crazy. I’m thinking too much. Someone needs to tell me to shut up.

<<[Michael Piggott: ... Triggered by Chris' ALIA/NSLA/NAA quotes from their evidence to the curious Senate's 2019 inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy, I decided to look at the submissions such bodies made to it. A couple of gems from the NSLA submission:](#)





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- -"As custodians of national, state and territory collections, our collection development policies are designed to address historical bias and to ensure that we continue to collect in a way that reflects population changes, including new migrant communities".
- -"The ethos that drives NED and indeed all NSLA collecting activity is to represent Australia as we are, not as we might wish to be perceived. Our preparedness as a nation to collect and preserve the less palatable aspects of our history and culture is one of the clearest demonstrations of confidence in our national identity and in our democracy".  
**And in recent press commentary about the evidence given to the inquiry, this quote:**
- -"Only the National Archives ... actually stops people, government officials, from destroying records..."

**ALIA and NSLA also like to quote surveys saying they are among the most trusted Australian institutions. So these statements must be correct, yes? Yet reading sentences like to three quoted, one wants to shout "Oh, really?? Are you sure??"**. They're not so much Robert Conquest's stupefying use of English as slippery plausible self-serving easily illustrated half-truths which will never be subjected to rigorous critical scrutiny. >>

**<< not so much ... stupefying use of English as slippery plausible self-serving easily illustrated half-truths >>**

Developing bulls^^t detection skills is, of course, the next stage in learning how to think critically.

**2021, February 27:**

I can't help myself-

To enlarge on Michael's theme (not suggesting he would agree with me on this) let us consider what the librarians and archivists might have said to the Senate's 2019 inquiry into nationhood, national identity, and democracy. We proclaim ourselves to be (inter alia) on the side of truth and open-ness. How if people like Sue McKerracher and David Fricker said that governments, in the service of democracy, should be less secretive and more truthful with people? How if they had supported the idea that the interests of the nation are advanced when folk can reach "evidence-based judgements on the world in which they live"? They couldn't say that to the people who employ them, of course. And there are nuanced arguments for upholding security. But there's nothing nuanced about avoiding the issue altogether on such a subject as that. Here is what a journalist might have said.

The 10-year campaign by the US government to criminalise reporting critical of its actions has failed in rather peculiar circumstances, with the unexpected decision by the court in London to reject the US demand for Julian Assange's extradition [now under appeal]. Judge Vanessa Baraitser gave as the reason for her decision Assange's mental health and possible suicide risk, not freedom of expression or evidence of a politically inspired persecution by the Trump administration ...

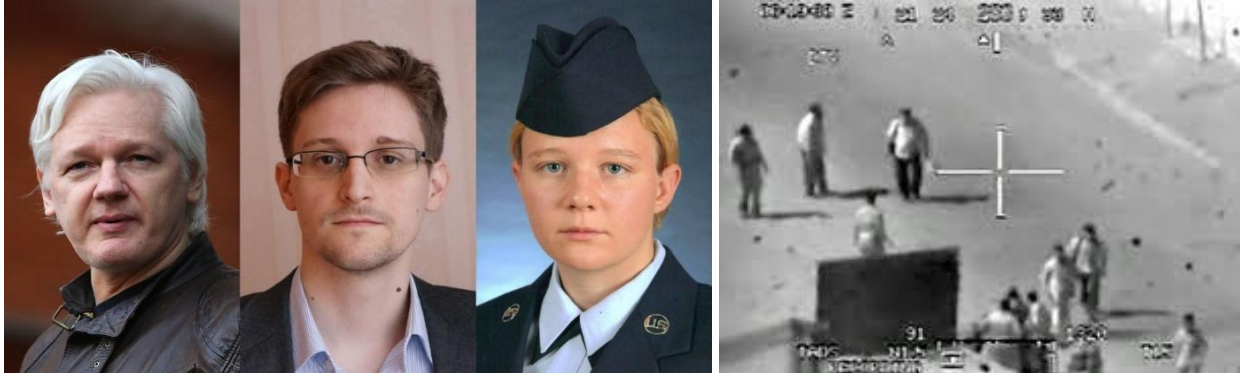
Had the US succeeded in extraditing Assange to face 17 charges under the Espionage Act of 1917, and one charge of computer-hacking, he could have been sentenced to 175 years in prison. His conviction would have had a devastating effect on freedom of the press, because what he was accused of doing is what every journalist and news outlet does or ought to do: find out significant information, which may or may not be labelled secret by self-interested governments, and pass it on to the public so they can reach evidence-based judgments on the world in which they live.

I followed the extradition hearings day-by-day last September, and there was nothing that Assange and WikiLeaks disclosed that I and any other decent reporter would not have revealed ... extracts from the US government files were published by *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde* and *El Pais*. They were described as the greatest scoop of the century, akin to Daniel Ellsberg giving the Pentagon Papers to the press in 1971.



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The most famous item was film taken by a US military helicopter in Baghdad in 2007 as it opened fire on a dozen Iraqi civilians, including two local journalists working for Reuters, killing them all. The Pentagon claimed that the targets were “terrorists” and had refused to release the video, despite a Freedom of Information Act request. I was in Baghdad at the time and the journalists there suspected what had really happened, but we could not prove it in the face of official denials.



[Assange](#)

[Snowden](#)

[Manning](#)

[Baghdad 2007](#)

It was the contents of the Apache helicopter video and thousands of other reports that so shocked a US military intelligence analyst called Bradley Manning, who later changed her name and legal gender to Chelsea Manning, that she handed the great cache of classified documents over to WikiLeaks. Despite claims to the contrary, the electronic files did not contain the deepest secrets of the US government, but they did reveal what it knew about its own activities and that of its allies. This was often deeply embarrassing and wholly contrary to what American governments had been saying to their own people and the world.

A US official explained to me at the time that the files – 251,287 diplomatic cables, over 400,000 classified reports from the Iraq War and 90,000 from the Afghan War – were filed on a system known as SiproNet (Secret Internet Protocol Router Network). This was designed to give wide access to useful information to hundreds of thousands of US government personnel. My diplomatic friend explained that with so many people able to read the files, the US government was not so naïve as to put its deepest secrets in it.

I was surprised 10 years ago by the outrage of the US and allied governments at the disclosures. An early claim that Assange and WikiLeaks had endangered the lives of US agents lost credibility when it was revealed in 2013 that a task force of 120 counterintelligence officers had failed to find a single instance of anybody who had died because of the WikiLeaks disclosures. Nevertheless, this charge was brought up against Assange by the lawyers for the US government at the extradition hearings that began last September.

The anger of the American and allied governments had little to do with the precise level of secrecy of the files that were disclosed. Many of the facts were already known or suspected by journalists. But the keeping of secrets – and their disclosure by the authorities themselves in their own interests – is an instrument of power that those possessing it will fight hard not to lose. Hence the dogged determination with which Assange has been pursued ever since.

The campaign to discredit him had much success. The newspapers that once feted him as the source of their scoops swiftly distanced themselves from him and from WikiLeaks. This had much to do with his status as a rape suspect in Sweden, though these allegations had nothing to do with the extradition hearings. I have a sense that the mainline establishment newspapers that had published the files were taken aback and intimidated by the explosive reaction of the American governments and its allies.

The majority of these publications consequently ignored or played down the Assange extradition hearings. The challenge to the freedom of the press was self-evident, as was the danger to journalists truthfully reporting facts, any one of which might be deemed a secret by the US government. They too could have faced espionage charges on exactly the same basis as Assange.



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Yet much of the media remained silent or made nit-picking attacks on Assange's personality, despite the seriousness of the case. The failure of the attempt to extradite Assange – if confirmed on appeal – gets them off the hook and they will no longer have to take a stand. This is one of the most worrying aspect of the case – the willingness of the media to stand to one side during one of the greatest attacks on press freedom in modern history.

**PS** It should be remembered that the prosecution of Assange was begun by Obama - a secrecy obsessive if ever there was one.

**2021, March 18:**

Another [example](#) of contested memory

A baleful silence attends one of the most talked-about figures in British history. You may enthuse endlessly about [Winston Churchill](#) “single-handedly” defeating Hitler. But mention his views on race or his colonial policies, and you’ll be instantly drowned in ferocious and orchestrated vitriol ... Many people want to know more about the historical figures they are required to admire uncritically ... Yet providing a fuller picture is made difficult. Scholars who explore less illustrious sides of Churchill are treated dismissively ...

In response to calls for fuller information about its founder, [Churchill College, Cambridge] set up a series of events on [Churchill, Empire and Race](#)... Even before it took place, the discussion was repeatedly denounced in the tabloids and on social media as “idiotic”, a “character assassination” aimed at “trashing” the great man. Outraged letters to the college said this was academic freedom gone too far, and that the event should be cancelled. The speakers and I, all scholars and people of colour, were subjected to vicious hate mail, racist slurs and threats. We were accused of treason and slander. One correspondent warned that my name was being forwarded to the commanding officer of an RAF base near my home.

The college is now under heavy pressure to stop doing these events. After the recent panel, the rightwing thinktank Policy Exchange, which is influential in government circles – and claims to champion free speech and controversial views on campus – published a “review” of the event. The foreword, written by Churchill’s grandson [Nicholas Soames](#), stated that he hoped the review would “prevent such an intellectually dishonest event from being organised at Churchill College in the future – and, one might hope, elsewhere”.

It’s ironic. We’re told by government and media that “cancel culture” is an imposition of the academic left. Yet here it is in reality, the actual “cancel culture” that prevents a truthful engagement with British history ... Critical assessment is not “character assassination”. Thanks to the groupthink of “the cult of Churchill”, the late prime minister has become a mythological figure rather than a historical one. To play down the implications of Churchill’s views on race – or suggest absurdly, as Policy Exchange does, that his racist words meant “something other than their conventional definition” – speaks to me of a profound lack of honesty and courage ...

To say nothing of his notorious military misjudgements (“alleged” of course) :

e.g. [Gallipoli](#), [Norway](#), [Greece](#). [Churchill said history would be kind to him because he intended to write it himself.] Why is it so difficult to look facts in the face, eschew black-or-white (hero-or-villain) interpretations, and make judgements free of emotional or ideological commitments. Because we’re human, I suppose. But you don’t have to deny that humanity if you seek, as Acton urged when he railed against dogma, to overcome it. And is it not becoming to simply shrug the shoulders and demolish the aspiration to be objective ([critical librarianship](#)) in order to clear the way for dogmas of one’s own,

**PS.** I see that populist responses to the report on war crimes in Afghanistan is now being framed (e.g. by Alan Jones et al) as supporting our veterans.

**<<Brigid Cooper: On a much more local and small-scale note, I am involved in planning for the commemoration of my local parish's 50th Anniversary. One of the**





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foundling parishioners has written a history booklet. We are currently grappling with telling the story of the 22 years that a now-convicted child-abusing priest spent at the parish. He was well liked, talented and, as with any Catholic priest, the centre of activities, celebrations and, of course, photographs. Turning the narrative around and making the story about events and parishioners, instead about the leader is hard for a generation who were trained to see no faults in their priests.>>

Purely by chance, I am (re)reading *1940: Year of Legend, Year of History* (1966) by [Laurence Thompson](#). Last night, as I nodded off, my eye fell on this passage dealing with Churchill's accession to the Prime Ministership:

For a moment it is possible to catch a glimpse of Churchill as he was on this day of assuming power, before the mists of legend engulf him along with Alfred who burnt the cakes but beat the Danes, Bruce and his unconquerable spider, all the other figures of a history blocked out for him in strong, certain masses of black and white in a way only possible to one almost totally immune from the disadvantages of education.

Hmmmm. "...only possible to one almost totally immune from the disadvantages of education...". It may have been possible to write that in 1966 – not so sure about today.

### 2021, March 29:

Assertions that we are prisoners of our own identity and forbidden from comprehending any broader experience gives rise to the cultural crime of "[appropriation](#)", delegitimising and devaluing thought that belongs to someone else. It is represented as theft of an experience, an idea, or an understanding that is someone else's property by virtue of their birth or allegiance (a privilege conferred by race, gender, and even by character or personality).

... the writers' association [PEN](#) is being drawn into dispute over a declaration claiming the right of authors to imagination, allowing them to describe the world from the point of view of characters from other cultural backgrounds. At issue is a charter manifesto, [The Democracy of the Imagination](#), passed unanimously by delegates of PEN International at the 85th world congress in Manila in 2019. A year on ... PEN's US arm, PEN America, has not endorsed the manifesto, which includes the principle: "PEN believes the imagination allows writers and readers to transcend their own place in the world to include the ideas of others."

While welcoming the commitment to freedom of expression, officials at PEN America indicate that aspects of the declaration might be perceived as straying into the contentious territory of cultural appropriation ... While accusations of misrepresentation are often made in social justice activism, only rarely have they extended into the realm of the imagination ... The manifesto ... may only serve to establish that freedom of expression is an area of increasing dissension. In 2015, PEN America was met with dissent ... over its decision to give its Freedom of Expression Courage Award to Charlie Hebdo. More recently, members of PEN's LA arm staged a protest over an invitation to Julian Assange to speak on press freedoms.

According to Chiari Bottici, author of *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary* and professor of philosophy at the New School in New York, the manifesto is beset with problems. "Imagination is the faculty to imagine what is not there, to give us the capacity to put ourselves in other people's shoes, but it is also what enables us to lie, and even purports such massive collective lies such as racism, sexism, classism, and thus even fascism ... a lot of racialised and sexed people have been unable to inhabit 'their own space' because they have been overwhelmed by the ideas and worldview of others ..."

How horrible it is for someone to claim ownership over the space in which another thinks and feels, to privilege their own insights not by facts and argument but by claims to virtue based on birth and experience, what James Madison pejoratively called "[the ambitious hope of making laws for the human mind](#)." It is one thing to argue, as did Madison, that thought is a person's "most sacred property" and to dispute strenuously with others you disagree with but just as personal liberty stops (as has been said) at the end of the other guy's nose, it must surely stop at the edge of another person's mind. It could be argued (probably has



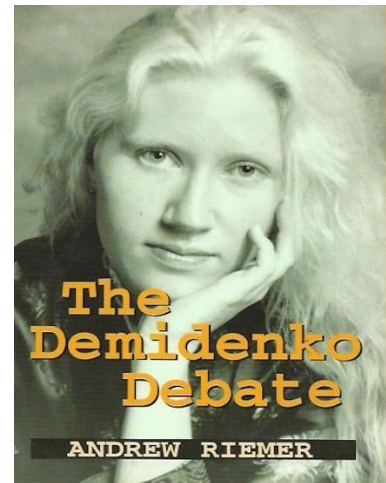
## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

been) that archival description (and memory work more generally) involves an imaginative understanding of the world and that this fight is ours also. But how much more is at stake for us in our endeavour to get at the facts and to wrestle with accuracy unencumbered by this sort of nonsense.

<<Michael Piggott: Had to smile at PEN America's thinking that aspects of the PEN International's declarations such as imagination allowing writers and readers transcend their own place in the world including the ideas of others "might be perceived as straying into the contentious territory of cultural appropriation". Might be perceived? What fertile imagination! Talk about an own goal. As for "cultural appropriation", one of the best local examples involved Helen Dale. It was a perfect storm culture wars controversy attracting terms like literary hoax, holocaust denial and ideological conformity. As for whether archivists and others in memory institutions need to be alert to the issue, I'm not sure, and probably like Chris hope - just for a change - others might post comments. Incidentally, the 1994 multi-award-winning book which started Dale's rise to fame/infamy, *The hand that signed the paper* which she published as Helen Demidenko, is catalogued by the NLA using this false name and Dewey numbers and subject terms assuming it to be fiction.>>



Cultural Appropriation or Swiftian Satire?



Helen "Demidenko"

**2021, March 30:**

<<Jeanette Bastian: ... I am wondering whether 'cultural appropriation' is more a matter of intent than anything else. While I don't think any of us can really walk in another person's shoes, certainly we can imagine that walk - and as long as we acknowledge that 'imagining' is what we are doing, rather than passing it off as the real thing isn't that at least one difference between fiction and non-fiction. I suggest that 'appropriation' is an issue for archivists particularly in terms of Collections. Collecting records from a particular ethnic or other community without their involvement and permission and then touting this collection as an example of the 'diversity' of the Archives might be considered appropriation.>>

<<Andrew Waugh: I think it's a little more nuanced than that. While I don't think that authors should be restricted to writing books (or characters) that reflect their own lived experience, I also think that there is a less pleasant underbelly to the authors' arguments ...

- The first issue is that there is no way that an author, or most of their readers, would have any way of knowing whether their imagination was sufficient ... given that the authors, the publishers, and the readers generally share a common background (in Australia, they are usually all white, middle class, and middle aged), it's not obvious why their shared judgement about emotional truth is at all likely to reflect that of a person from a different



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background ... I can certainly understand why a community would be angry about someone from outside their community telling their stories badly ...

- The second issue flows on from the first. Authors write books to make money ... I can well understand the anger in various communities about such privileged authors monetising the community's stories ...
- Cynically, I can't help feeling that there is a final issue. There seems to be a strong element of self interest in the position of some of the authors. If it becomes the norm in literature that you're expected to have experienced the life you focus on in your work, the literary opportunities for white, middle class, authors are going to be restricted.

Like many 'cancel culture' panics this is being framed from the perspective of the privileged ... if you're an author telling someone else's story then you might have to get used to being criticised if your imagination doesn't cut it, or just because you're presuming to tell the story at all ... And I should have said that the issues here have exact parallels in the work of archivists, as has been long pointed out. Archivists in, for example, a government archive are writing archival descriptions about records created by people who are just like them. In many cases this doesn't matter (describing railway records, for example). In other cases it may matter a lot.>>

<<Mike Jones: Well said Andrew ... these issues are not just about the individual, or the right to imagine things about which one has no direct experience. It is about privilege and the functioning of power—which voices are published and promoted, and who is excluded as a result. Perhaps an interesting archival example is to consider LGBTIQ+ archives or trans archives. I would argue the most effective examples of these archives around the world were founded and are largely run by members of the communities who are the subjects of the archives. If anyone were to claim that any archivist could just as easily write the acquisition policies and retention and disposal schedules for these organisations and build their archival holdings for these communities, provided they were diligent, objective, and perhaps imaginative enough to do so is a position some might take, but I can't see much evidence of this being the case in practice.>>

<<Archivists ... are writing archival descriptions about records created by people who are just like them. In many cases this doesn't matter (describing railway records, for example). In other cases it may matter a lot>>

Quite so. When I am describing records of the Aboriginal protection system (including children being removed from their parents), I am indeed describing records created by people just like me. Well, maybe not just like me because the past is a foreign country. But such records are about people who are very much not like me. That's their parallel provenance. derived from those Aboriginal people who created the records in another sense (being parties to the activity which gave rise to their formation). That's why people (not just Aboriginal people) who are subject of the pressure of involvement with the records-maker (or who are descended from them or who identify in some other way) will tell you that such records are their records, part of their heritage.

How deficient would your description be if it reflected the purpose of the activity depicted in the records solely from the point of view of the government whose programme it was, taking at face value their rationale and justification at the time – since abandoned (and maybe apologised for at a later time). And wouldn't it be just as wrong to swallow uncritically their subsequent explanations and rationalisations (and, yes, their apologies too). And what about the voice of those good, well-meaning people who fostered the stolen children? You can see another point of view, a different experience, in the puzzled faces and pained tones when they are interviewed on TV and accused of cruelty. Who speaks for them?





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Well, my answer (it will surprise no one to hear) is not us. It's not our job to take the point of view of anyone involved in the activity (governments, Aborigines, foster carers, activists, the children themselves or their families) but to depict it as accurately as we can.



People say to me that this is heartless, that we have a duty to empathise with injustice (in effect, to take sides). I think that is too heavy a burden for the humble descriptive archivist or maybe just something that interferes with our single-minded purpose to get at the truth and let others make their judgements based on our best endeavours to give them the means to do so. Let us be clear. This involves separating, so far as we can, our professional technique from our humanity. If we submit that technique to the claims of empathy, we sacrifice judgement for feeling.

From that perspective (and I know this view is not widely shared) it is not difficult to resist charges of appropriation since the basis for such charges is a false one – viz. that in order to get at the truth of something you have to be something you are not (and never can be). That the mind cannot comprehend someone else's experience is obvious enough. But why should their experience give rise to judgement that is any truer than mine? But the cancellation doctrine goes further than that, doesn't it? It denigrates and delegitimises my judgement in favour of that of someone else. And it does so, not on the basis that it is a better, truer, more accurate analysis, but because of who that person is. I think that deferring to someone else's judgment in those circumstances is demeaning to them and shameful to me.

**2021, March 31:**

**<<Let us be clear. This involves separating, so far as we can, our professional technique from our humanity. If we submit that technique to the claims of empathy, we sacrifice judgement for feeling.>>**

Does this, then, mean there is no place in description (and memory work more generally) for morality and feeling? Of course not. How could anyone suppose that judgement can be devoid of either. That's not my point at all. I'm with Acton – judgement is the antithesis of "neutrality", analysis must reach a conclusion. What is at issue here is how to make judgements, by whom they can be made. and the distinction between technique and values.

**<<If I ruled the world, critical thinking would, as I've said before, be central to education – not what to think, but how to think. 26 Feb., 2021>>**

### **"Nerd immunity"**

How many conspiracy theorists does it take to change a lightbulb? ... it takes only a dozen anti-vaxxers to spread dangerous misinformation to millions of people. According to a report from the NGO Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), up to 65% of anti-vaccine content on Facebook and Twitter can be traced back to just 12 people. Although Facebook has disputed the report's methodology, the 12 have been nicknamed the "disinformation dozen", and include Robert F Kennedy Jr, the nephew of John F Kennedy ... Free-speech



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issues aside, banning people from tech platforms is a game of whack-a-mole. As long as the incentive structures for spreading false information remain in place, more conspiracy theorists will pop up ... They have nifty ways to hijack your attention, but they can't wave a magic wand and force you to believe that Bill Gates engineered the pandemic so that he can implant trackable microchips in people ... Misinformation is never going to go away; it isn't just a Big Tech problem, it's an education problem. Instead of just yelling at tech companies, politicians should be focusing on what Taiwan's digital minister calls "[nerd immunity](#)" – the government should be investing in education so people have the skills to identify fake news.

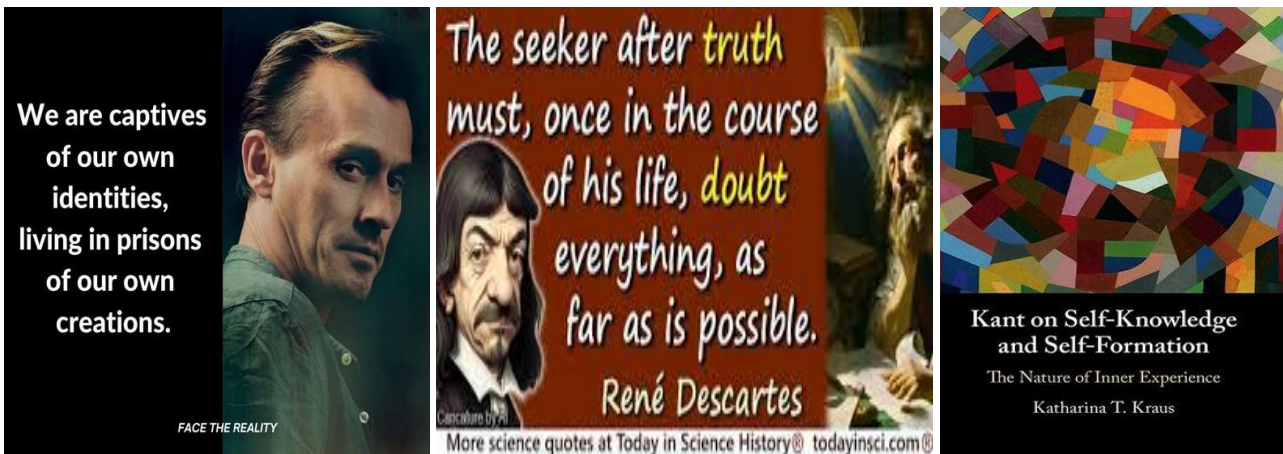
Finland, which was rated Europe's most resistant nation to fake news last year, is [one model of how you do this](#). In 2014, after an increase in disinformation from Russia, the government embedded media literacy in the national curriculum. Starting in primary school, kids learn the critical thinking skills needed to parse the modern information ecosystem. Students learn how easy it is to manipulate statistics in their maths lessons, for example. They learn how to distinguish satire from conspiracy theories in their Finnish lessons. They look at how images can be used for propaganda in art class. And this sort of education isn't just given to children: Finnish civil servants, journalists and NGO workers are also trained in digital literacy skills ...

Banning a few anti-vaxxers from Facebook may have short-term benefits but if we want to build healthy societies in the long-term we have to prioritise education and develop nerd immunity.

**<<... these issues are not just about the individual, or the right to imagine things about which one has no direct experience. It is about privilege and the functioning of power ...>>**

We are [prisoners of identity until we transcend it](#) and we begin that journey with a proper understanding of difference.

The question of difference as it relates to the nature and implications of the historical encounter between Indic and Western cultural and intellectual traditions under the British Empire can be broadly approached in two ways: difference as identity and difference as thought. In the discourse of difference as identity, the notion of difference functions as the basis of cultural and national identity. In the discourse of difference as thought, on the other hand, difference functions as a marker of the nature and specificity of thought, its origin and historical significance. The crucial difference between the two approaches is that difference as thought goes beyond identity in its claim to universality and truth.



**2021, April 3:**

### **Facts are stubborn things**

Is a transcendent reach beyond identity and towards independence of mind an abnegation of faith or is it rather a commitment to [universality and truth](#) that refuses to be shackled by “social context” (past or present)?



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

Rooting around the basement of my family home in Mannheim, south-west [Germany](#), some years ago, I discovered evidence that in 1938 my grandfather had taken advantage of antisemitic Nazi policies to buy a small business from a Jewish family at a low price ... After the war [a survivor from the family] wrote asking for reparations, but my grandfather refused to face up to his responsibilities.

I was shocked ... "I used to tell my father: what upsets me is not that you've done the Nazi salute ..., it's that even today you still don't recognise the atrocities of the Third Reich and your own responsibility." Testimonies are less reliable than documents. They are filtered through experience and emotion, sadness and anger, but also love and loyalty. I had to confront them with historical facts. How far was it possible not to be a Nazi under the Third Reich? ... If conceiving of Auschwitz was difficult, it was still impossible to have "seen nothing, heard nothing" ... I also took into account the psychosocial mechanisms that form social and individual attitudes: conformism to moral standards, fear, opportunism, as well as political and ideological manipulation ...

Eventually I came to the conclusion that my grandfather was not blind to the immorality of his actions. He was enabled by the legalisation of the looting of Jewish property, but he acted from an opportunism that was his own ... Beyond the complexity of historical contexts and the grey areas of any human endeavour, there are actions that were as wrong yesterday as they are today. Taking refuge in moral relativism while facing the shadows of history is an easy escape, but it leads to a dead end. Yet how many countries are [stuck in denial](#) under the pretext that they refuse to judge their imperial past by today's standards? ...

The millions of Europeans who directly and indirectly benefited from the slave trade while keeping a Bible by their beds were not ignorant or unenlightened. They were simply opportunists and hypocrites, bigots betraying their God when it suited them ... Throughout this dark history, voices, especially those of the enslaved and colonised themselves, were calling out these immoral double standards.

If Britain and other nations want to come to terms with their past, they need to accept a minimal consensus: slavery and colonialism cannot be explained by the "social and moral standards" of a different age ... Such consensus wouldn't "cancel" the debate; instead it would depolarise it. It would open the possibility for fruitful dialogue and help overcome the old victim-versus-perpetrator dialectic, replacing it with a culture of honesty and responsibility ... reading German historian Norbert Frei, I understood that the fact that we cannot know what we would have done "does not mean that we do not know how we should have behaved".

***I flatter myself that with this statute we have in this country extinguished forever the ambitious hope of making laws for the human mind. (1786)***

[James Madison clarifying the difference between freedom and toleration](#)

**2022, December 22:**

Thought we might get back to this one eventually (I say "we" because this thread attracted few participants).

The unenlightened are going nutty over the [Cambridge Dictionary](#) redefining "man" and "woman" to provide for gender diversity, raising the interesting issue of whether it is a dictionary's job to describe or prescribe - to approve usage or try to tame it. Should a dictionary follow a shift in usage or lead it? It is clear a dictionary must portray the language as she is spoke (what else is there to base a definition on unless you're a [grammarian](#) - a "wise man, person who knows Latin, or magician"?), but is this definition shift accurate? Are the Cambridge scholars implying that common usage of these terms does now (where it didn't before) generally acknowledge diversity or that it may (that all do, most do, or some do & some don't)? Or, have they become Culture Warriors urging that it should cf. Pronoun Wars?

Do **our finding aids** portray things as they are, as they seem to us, or as they seem to some folks (but not necessarily everyone)? Should we try to [stand aloof and be "objective"](#),





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acknowledge the tension and try to be "[balanced](#)" or even corrective. [enter the fray](#) and take sides, or offer [parallel views](#) as best we can and cop it from everyone? Happy the archivist (if any) who has not grappled with these issues.

**2023, January 9:**

**When is "respect" intolerance? When is "diversity" subjugation? When does "harm" suppress debate? ("Respect ... should have superseded academic freedom" Chilling.)**

<<Do our finding aids portray things as they are, as they seem to us, or as they seem to some folks (but not necessarily everyone)? Should we try to [stand aloof and be "objective"](#), acknowledge the tension and try to be "[balanced](#)" or even corrective, [enter the fray](#) and take sides, or offer [parallel views](#) as best we can and cop it from everyone? >>



It is a beautiful painting found in a 14th-century Persian manuscript ... It shows the Prophet Muhammad receiving his first Quranic revelations from the angel Gabriel ... Last October, an instructor at Hamline University, Minnesota, displayed the painting during an online class on Islamic art. The instructor (who has not been named) had warned of what she was about to do in case anyone found the image offensive and [did not wish to view it](#). No matter, a student complained to the university authorities. David Everett, Hamline's associate vice-president of inclusive excellence, condemned the classroom exercise as "undeniably inconsiderate, disrespectful and Islamophobic". A letter written by Mark Berkson, chair of the department of religion, defending the instructor and providing historical and religious context for her actions, was [published on the website of \*The Oracle\*](#), the university's student newspaper, and then [taken down because it "caused harm"](#). The instructor was ["released" from further teaching duties](#).

It is a depressing but all too familiar story. From *The Satanic Verses* to the Danish cartoons to *Charlie Hebdo*, the last decades have spawned a succession of often murderous controversies over depictions of [Islam](#) deemed blasphemous or racist. What is striking about the Hamline incident, though, is that the image at the heart of the row cannot even in the most elastic of definitions be described as Islamophobic. It is an artistic treasure that exalts Islam and has long been cherished by Muslims. Yet, to show it is now condemned as Islamophobic because... a student says so. Even to question that claim is to cause "harm". As [Berkson asked in another \(unpublished\) letter](#) he sent to *The Oracle*, after his first had been removed: "Are you saying that disagreement with an argument is a form of 'harm'?"

That is precisely [what the university is saying](#). "Respect for the observant Muslim students in that classroom should have superseded academic freedom," wrote Fayneese Miller, the university's president, and Everett in a letter to staff and students ... Universities should defend all students' right to practise their faith. They should not allow that faith to dictate the curriculum. That is to introduce blasphemy taboos into the classroom. Hamline has effectively declared whole areas of Islamic history beyond scholarly purview because they may cause offence ... As Audrey Truschke, associate professor of South Asian history at



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Rutgers University, [observed](#), Hamline's action "endangers... professors who show things in class, from premodern Islamic art to Hindu images with swastikas to *Piss Christ*".

One can only wonder that the university bureaucrats who declared representations of Muhammad to be proscribed by Islam did not ask themselves why, if this was true, there were figurative Islamic paintings to show the class in the first place? There has developed a historical amnesia about the many Islamic traditions, especially Persian, Turkish and Indian, which have celebrated portrayals of Muhammad; portrayals found in manuscripts, paintings, postcards, even in mosques. While there have always been debates on this issue within Islam, the strict prohibition on picturing Muhammad is primarily Sunni and relatively recent. The growth of Wahhabism, a fundamentalist strand of Islam that developed in the 18th century and came eventually to be the ideological cement of modern Saudi Arabia, has been particularly important ... Even so, Gruber observes, as late as 2000, a senior Saudi-based legal scholar [recognised certain portrayals of Muhammad](#) as both "permissible and laudable". Only in the wake of 9/11, and the emergence of more fundamentalist forms of Islam, did the absolute prohibition of images of Muhammad become more widely accepted.

The actions of Hamline University are a threat not just to academic freedom but to religious freedom, too. They implicitly disavow the variety of traditions that constitute Islam and condemn those traditions as in some sense so bigoted that they cannot be shown in a class on Islamic art history. University bureaucrats are, as non-Muslims, taking part in a theological debate within Islam and siding with the extremists. That is why, the historian Amna Khalid observes, [Hamline] have "flattened the rich history and diversity of Islamic thought" and "privileged a most extreme and conservative Muslim point of view". In an age in which there are demands for the syllabus to be "decolonised", she adds, "Hamline's position is a kind of arch-imperialism, reinforcing a monolithic image of Muslims propounded by the cult of authentic Islam". Perhaps the most damaging aspect of Hamline's action is the use of the language of diversity to eviscerate the very meaning of diversity ... Too many people today demand that we respect the diversity of society, but fail to see the diversity of minority communities in those societies. As a result, progressive voices often get dismissed as not being authentic, while the most conservative figures become celebrated as the true embodiment of their communities ... Both bigots and liberals erase the richness and variety of Muslim communities ...

Diversity used to mean the creation of a space for dissent and disagreement and tolerance the willingness to live with things that one might find offensive or distasteful. Now, diversity too often describes a space in which dissent and disagreement have to be expunged in the name of "respect" and tolerance requires one to refrain from saying or doing things that might be deemed offensive. It is time we re-grasped both diversity and tolerance in their original sense.

**2023, January 21:**

**<<if you're an author telling someone else's story then you might have to get used to being criticised if your imagination doesn't cut it, or just because you're presuming to tell the story at all. Andrew's Waugh 30 May, 2021>>**

Andrew's comments about the perils of imaginative literature also apply, it seems to me, to the work of historians and descriptive archivists, Indeed, Mike Jones said as much on 30 May 2021:

*If anyone were to claim that any archivist could just as easily write the acquisition policies and retention and disposal schedules for these organisations and build their archival holdings for these communities, provided they were diligent, objective, and perhaps imaginative enough to do so is a position some might take, but I can't see much evidence of this being the case in practice.*

What is the difference between ease and accuracy? Would anyone dare argue that diligence and objectivity might produce a better result (however defined) and not just an equivalent one? Who owns rights over the use and interpretation of ideas? Is there ever a settled view or just the latest one awaiting revision? Doesn't a community claiming ownership over its own past fortify separation at the risk of subverting empathy? Possibly another example of



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"*history's capacity to create obstacles*" (see 12 Feb., 2021). Might not a better argument be that community involvement is an antidote to neglect by diligent, objective, imaginative outsiders?

The jostle around use and interpretation is well illustrated by the term [Holocaust](#) which has been broadened from ethnically-based slaughter (Armenians, Jews, Roma, Kurds) to include widespread killing that is not specifically genocidal in nature (although the geo-political dynamic means it is often ethnically focussed). [Asian Holocaust](#) has been applied to Japanese crimes against civilian and military personnel during (and in the period leading up to) WW2.

### The Asian Holocaust

A few days ago, China [announced](#) that it would re-write its school textbooks to add 6 years to a war it fought with Japan in the 1930s and 40s. Rather than listing the war as lasting "from 1937–1945," the new books would describe the conflict as spanning 14 years, from 1931–1945 ... the news is a reminder that Japan raped, tortured and murdered tens of millions of people in what's [become known](#) as "the Asian Holocaust" — something that textbooks in Western countries [barely](#) even mention at all ... *New Visions* 17 Jan., 2017

These matters are especially fraught with disputes over terminology, facts, and interpretation. The term is now increasingly applied to any large-scale [massacre](#) (an indiscriminate and brutal slaughter of many people). Wikipedia's attempt to [rank](#) them demonstrates (to my mind) the perils of comparison.

- The list doesn't go further back than 1755, with two odd exceptions (the [Sack of Carthage](#) 149 BC and the [Asiatic Vespers](#) in 88 BC). This leaves out Sicilian Vespers, Genghis Khan, Indigenous North Americans, decimation by disease of South America's indigenous people, the Huns, the Vikings, Spanish Inquisition, St Bartholomew, North Korea, and many worse exterminations attributed to the Romans (*they create a desert and call it peace* in the immortal words of Tacitus).
- Boundaries are slippery and likely disputed. Nazi killing of Jews is separated on the List from massacres in Eastern Europe generally - with Poles, for no apparent reason, also separated out. [Tasmanian Aborigines](#) are listed but not Aborigines generally during White Settlement.
- Estimated deaths range from a top of 4.2–7.0 million down to 400-1,000 on the List raising the contrast between quantity and texture. The Shoah, for example, is estimated (according to the List) to have eliminated two-thirds of European Jews whereas the much smaller (est, 1,900) [Mori Genocide](#) is said to have eradicated 95%. Which is worse: the bigger or the more extensive?

This slipperiness may arise from projection of current political and/or ideological interest in aligning the past with later, anachronistic concerns. The definitions become very slippery indeed when a distinction is made between [crimes against humanity](#) (e.g, persecution, enslavement, suppression) and the more specific notion of [war-crimes](#) (which revolves around what is lawful when you kill people in battle). Topically, the [Holodomor](#) is estimated to have cost between 3.9 and 5.0 million lives – cf. Robert Conquest [Harvest of Sorrow](#), an example where a community sought an outsider to speak for them:

In 1981, the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute approached Conquest with the project of a book on the 1932–1933 famine. The Ukrainian National Association, a New Jersey-based ethnic fraternal group with a [hard-right](#) tradition (its newspaper [Svoboda](#) was banned by Canada during World War II for its pro-German sympathies), sponsored the work with a \$80,000 subsidy ... In accepting the sponsorship, Conquest was perceived as being in the pocket of the Ukrainians. In response to those claims, Conquest stated: "I did not do the book specifically on the Ukraine. About half the book is on the non-Ukrainian side ... The sponsors made no attempt whatever to suggest what I should write ...





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The United States Congress promoted awareness of the Holodomor and set U.S. Commission on the Ukraine Famine, which was authorized in 1985 ... The commission conducted archival and oral history research under a \$382,000 congressional appropriation, leading to a final report conclusion in 1988 that "Joseph Stalin and those around him committed genocide against the Ukrainians in 1932–1933." ... *The Harvest of Sorrow* had a clear moral intent, namely that if the older Soviet leaders were direct accomplices in an artificially contrived famine and the younger leaders today still justify such procedure, then it followed that they might be willing to kill tens of millions of foreigners or suffer a loss of millions of their own subjects in a war ...

**2023, January 23:**

**<<The State cannot stymie the evil of misinformation and it cannot establish a Ministry of Truth. Information warfare can only be won by boots on the ground in the culture wars. People, not Policy. Culture cannot be planned “because it is also the unconscious background of all planning” (T S Eliot). But I agree that the State can help People to get on their feet (“to read and interpret”) - without having control over where that will lead. A bureaucrat’s nightmare ... CH 26 Feb., 2021>>**

Only just caught up with this [article](#) in *The Guardian* from last June:

[A] survey by the Higher Education Policy Institute (Hepi) found that current students are more likely to support measures that restrain freedom of speech or expression on campus, and approve of removing offensive materials and memorials, compared with their predecessors ...

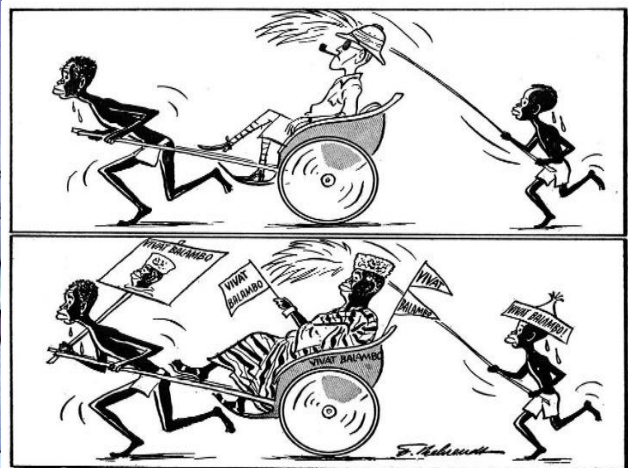
No surprises there. It needs no survey by Hepi to tell us this. What I found interesting was in the tail end of the article:

The survey revealed little interest in banning political parties or organisations from campus ... There was little support for banning mainstream political parties, with 11% wanting a ban on the Conservatives, 5% a ban on Labour, and a further 5% a ban on the Liberal Democrats.

Mainstream political parties may have become so bland that there is little motivation left to silence them. If young British intellectuals are anything to go by, it may be that social issues are becoming more important to them than political ones. Perhaps this is a by-product of their being more continuously engaged with social media than in occasionally participating in the ballot— replacing interest in politics with a thirst for [social control](#). One is almost tempted to think of bread and circuses and a disenfranchised Roman populace.



**Cancellation**



Januar 1960 Neue Leute

**De-colonisation**

Growing support for “*measures that restrain freedom of speech or expression*” is likely to be very much concerned with “*having control over where that will lead*”. A social solution to a political problem that needs no Ministry of Truth, albeit one that is a nightmare for free-



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thinkers. As ever, the US (where social conflict leeches back into political toxicity) seems to afford an exception to the rest of the Anglo-Sphere.

**2023, January 26:**

### Australia Day Reflection

<< While our memories are imperfect and can shape states in unpredictable ways, they substantially inform our views and what we believe to be “truth.” Memory, therefore, is one of the best, yet underappreciated, tools that we have for post-conflict reconciliation >>

<< The complex events we recall and commemorate during this time are integral to the story that has shaped our nations, in all their diversity. They are, however, events to be remembered and understood, respecting the fact that different perspectives exist. In doing this, we can facilitate a more authentic interpretation ... This journey of ethical remembering [allows] us to examine the nature of commemoration itself and how it might unburden us of history’s capacity to create obstacles to a better, shared future ... Quoted in this thread on 12 Feb., 2021>>

Where is the dividing line between memory-induced reconciliation and sectarianism? Between bringing-togetherness and dividing-from-each-otherness? Between moving on and looking back? As custodians of memories (just some of them, not all) these are questions for us. Northern Ireland used to be the by-word for sectarian violence based on historical differences and remembered grievances. This has now (happily) subsided there into mere political bitterness but within a still fragile context. The assault on Australia Day here began in 1938 with the first Day of Mourning. It was celebrated then

You came here only recently, and you took our land away from us by force. You have almost exterminated our people, but there are enough of us remaining to expose the humbug of your claim, as white Australians, to be a civilised, progressive, kindly and humane nation,

and opposed then

The most effective way to help the aborigines was not to weep and bemoan the past, but to act in the living present. The time was past to talk of the segregation of the aborigines. They should come more fully into the national family

in terms that echo some of our present debates but without the capital “A”.

The transition from humbug to enlightenment was always going to be intense but not necessarily violent. It is unlikely that racial sectarianism will overtake us here in Australia any time soon (it might disrupt the Cricket) but am I alone in wondering if a more modest backlash may arise when assertion prods complacency too far?

Historical acceptance is one of the five dimensions of reconciliation. Acceptance would mean all Australians acknowledge this nation’s history of injustice, colonisation, dispossession, displacement, exploitation and violence against First Nations people ... The topic of Australia’s difficult history is also often rebutted as First Nations people’s failure to move on and simply “get over it” ... Research has found non-Indigenous people can feel Australia’s tainted history is at odds with their own faith-based values or cultural world views (for example, not to be rude or to speak out). This can lead to a kind of culture shock, bringing another barrier to learning about the cultural politics of this country. Culture shock can lead to people feeling their identity is under attack when being educated. This can lead to defensiveness, feelings of guilt and culpability, animosity and fragility.

... In 2020, Australian National University researchers tested more than 11,000 Australian participants for implicit, unconscious bias. This research found 75% of participants held a negative or unconscious bias against Indigenous people. This correlation between negative bias could mean the development of racist attitudes, which is in stark contrast to the utopian initiatives of Reconciliation Week ... Addressing racism within Australia is not just a cognitive exercise. True change requires constant education, critical reflection and self awareness. When



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we ignore engaging with emotive content and fundamental learning, we are ignoring the very real human suffering occurring within this country. Reconciliation becomes nothing more than preformative allyship, enacted one week of every year. [\*Bindi Bennett\*](#)

I am reluctant to apply the term “*cognitive exercise*” to any part of the Australian consciousness but it seems to me that the elites (of which we are part) are well away down the path of “*engaging with emotive content*” and that a bit more cognition might not go amiss. Our shrines of memory (holding on to many of the sources) are all doing their bit with [Diversity Plans](#) and [Displays](#). It remains to be seen [whether the fair-dinkums will follow](#) when they are required to move on from their default position of amiable-feel-good-virtue to “*feeling their identity is under attack when being educated*” (when it comes down to a choice between empathy and lamb chops). Beware of prodding “*unconscious bias*” too far, perhaps? And I fear [David Unaipon’s](#) plea for [assimilation](#) “*into a national family*” is a lost cause.

If the non-indigenous are to collaborate on the road to reconciliation it involves honestly placing “*injustice, colonisation, dispossession, displacement, exploitation and violence*” alongside

**[health, education, housing, booze, domestic violence,](#)**  
**[child abuse, incarceration, street violence,](#)**

and so on – the whole damn’ thing - and not inviting derision by obsessing on trivial matters like anniversaries. Reconciliation’s foundations should be built on the serious issues, not the cosmetic ones. Nothing wrong with make-up – so long as you don’t mistake it for the real thing. And when you start probing some of the serious issues (such as booze, juvenile crime, and domestic violence) you begin to uncover social problems in this country that go well beyond the indigenous community. Turns out some of them aren’t just Black Problems after all. How’s that for assimilation? As always, the key questions are [how to link the past to the present](#) and [whether the past is a yoke or a springboard](#).

But I seriously doubt that the dreadful statistics apply to all indigenous people anyway. If you exclude the fully or partly [integrated](#) (those employed in or running businesses, working 9 to 5, living in towns and cities, elected representatives, professionals and tradesmen, actors, musicians, and writers, service personnel, [advisors](#), and all the [activists](#)) you are left with those still enduring the [legacy of reserves and missions in camps and on the outskirts of rural townships](#) and (more hopefully) in [homelands and outstations](#) and that is where the horror is to be found and must be dealt with. And if that distinction is not being made in the data, then the metrics are even worse than they appear. But we are often invited to think in stereotypes (especially by some politicians, activists, shock-jocks, and commentators who have few qualms about speaking for indigenous people as a category) - the notion that indigenous Australians are all one undifferentiated group, who think alike, and to whom the same generalities, norms, nostrums, and platitudes can be applied, shrugging off this lazy approach with modifiers such as “some” or “typically”. The ludicrous idea that the health issues facing my Aboriginal neighbour in suburban Narara are the same as in the townships. So like a crusade. So insulting!

Thoughtful proponents of reconciliation understand that it is [too blunt](#) an instrument (“*interpretation of the concept continues to be debated, as well as its usefulness in making real improvements to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*”). When you only have a hammer, everything is a nail. Celebration, empathy, and mourning are easier to handle but they only take you so far. The truth is more complicated. As the many links embedded in this post tend to show, those complications are being explored and set forth and, so far as I can judge, the websites of our memory houses mostly make an honourable contribution with [contextualising narratives](#), [research guides](#), and [discovery aids](#). The





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archivist (I have always believed) works out from the particularity and avoids generalised or stereotypical narratives. There lies our professional advantage.

Our Canadian cousins are treading the same path: 69% “*believe King Charles III should advance the cause of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples*” while a mere 54% “*believe Queen Elizabeth II’s passing should have been observed and marked with a full holiday for everyone*”. Glad to see they’ve got their priorities straight over there. I can’t believe anyone would ask those questions, let alone answer them, except as an exercise to demonstrate how vacuous the vulgar mind can be.

**PS** Central Coast Council is observing Australia Day so my daily early morning visit to the hydrotherapy pool has been disarranged today. Hmmmph. Doesn’t happen on Reconciliation Day. And I see that double demerits will apply, so that might be another reason for scrapping this holiday.

### 2023, January 27:

Australia Day may mark the 1788 landing of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove or in the alternative view the day we ceased to be Britons (the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* which came into force on 26 January 1949). Either way, it is clear that it has now become (surprisingly perhaps) something else. It has become a day-off but also (for many) a day of celebration about who we are, what we have become, and what we aspire to be - in all our mongrel diversity. This may be down in part to enthusiasm expressed by many of post-war and more recent immigrant and refugee origin.

Indigenous protest objects to this, wants us to feel bad about it, wants us to apologise. I hope not all indigenous people feel that way because it sends an awful message (intentionally or not) that indigenous people don’t want to be part of us, that they want separation and division. And I can’t see how that can be any part of reconciliation. Somehow (I don’t know how) our indigenous past has to become part of our national story - I don’t know how but, even at the risk of ideological conflict, I believe our houses of memory have to find that tone as many are trying hard to do (I believe).

As I’ve said, I think bickering about an anniversary is trivial. And there might be trivial reasons for changing the date – not wanting the inconvenience of a holiday that may fall mid-week for example, but I suppose what makes it less trivial are the ideological implications (intended or not) – that indigenous people demand “other-ness” (a word I don’t use), that they seek confrontation and exceptionalism instead of diversity and understanding – irreconcilable because no apology will ever be enough.



<<**Andrew Waugh**: I’m sure, Chris, that you are aware that things can be symbols for multiple ideas. Even if it was true that January 26 has now become “(for many) a day of celebration about who we are, what we have become, and what we aspire to be - in all our mongrel diversity,” this does not mean that it cannot also be a symbol for the



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invasion of indigenous Australia. Indeed, the very debate over the meaning of January 26 is symbolic about the refusal of white Australia to acknowledge the history of Australia. The very insistence that Australia Day is about a "celebration about who we are, what we have become, and what we aspire to be" is notably a refusal to consider Australia's history ... And so "bickering" about the date is not "trivial". It actually goes to the heart of white Australia's acceptance of its black history.>>

<<David Povey: ... I assume you mean Black *pre*-history, that is the period before the keeping of records, as the keeping of records is necessary for something to be "history" ... Whether White Australians choose to celebrate Australia Day on January 26 is a matter of little concern to most residents of remote Australia - although one woman said when asking me for a pair of thongs - "You stole the whole fucking country, and you won't even give me a pair of thongs!".>>

**2023, January 27:**

### Protesters gather across Sydney and Melbourne ...

*This is a war. A war that was declared on our people over 200 years ago ... It's a day to remember the murders and \*\*\*\*\* massacres of my people ... I think it's important to get the voice in Parliament ... No, I'm Treaty first, and I always have been ... We don't want to celebrate it and I don't think that anyone should ... A Referendum is not for us, it's not for you ... This is the voice [and] they don't want to hear it because we live in our truth ... I think we all need to come together and fight until we achieve that ... I'm going to support them no matter what they want ...*

Neither you nor I, Andrew, can speak for indigenous people. I prefer to analyse what I see as the part indigenous voices do/ought/might play in the process of reconciliation and how we may reciprocate – not to imagine what they think or to try to speak for them - not even to endorse or condemn what I think they think - but to have a view (certainly) on how those voices which are being raised support or subvert the reconciliation process. You seem to think that taking sides is necessary, but I believe that taking sides is counter-productive. But at the same time judgement is needed. Reconciliation can't be about winners and losers. White Australia has to change (surely) but also (maybe) Black Australia must change also. I can't see how being a microphone for the rhetoric and playing the blame game (if that's all it is) helps.

But it's not all rhetoric. Indigenous people are not all of one mind as the video shows. Your temperate account of a position that may or may not be held by some in the indigenous community is a plea for me to sign on to a position that you are imagining is theirs. As you say "Change the Day" is symbolic and yielding the Day would certainly have a significance for some people that I simply don't think it has. But it's become a totem that is invested with a significance that is passionately felt but which I think would deliver very little. I'd prefer to ask questions about what really matters. Without in any way denying the place of memory, I would like to go beyond denouncing the past in order to keep on fixing the present. You seem to be saying that we can't do the one without first doing the other. One of the "multiple ideas" voiced yesterday is that nothing has changed and that is plainly wrong. The focus should be on how to make things better not on blaming every unsolved problem on "*the refusal of white Australia to acknowledge [our] history*". And, if I may say so, I don't think all White Australians are of one mind about that either.

I'd prefer to engage directly with the people for whom you are claiming to speak, only a fraction of whom we see on the streets, and when I do I'll be giving back my view in what should be a dialogue, not a rant. A dialogue might lead to understanding (but not necessarily to agreement). A rant demands winners and losers and if you think that is the path to reconciliation you're probably not alone, but I think you're wrong. Of course, all this is



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hypothetical; at my age I won't be in dialogue with anyone but I'm dreaming now about how reconciliation might occur.

Since I believe the issue is trivial, if giving up the Day would help I for one would happily do so. But if you believe that would bring us into more harmonious relations with the angry people we see on the streets, again I think you're wrong. If you're right and giving up the Day would help, let's do it and not bicker about it. But let's not indulge in deceptive fantasies either about what would result. A judgement about that depends on a nuanced understanding of what indigenous people want (and I'm not sure that those the Government is listening to about The Voice are much better than you or I at understanding that). Be that as it may, I also believe that White Fellas (like you and me) are entitled to have views of our own that may not align with what Black Fellas think and that reconciliation, while it involves trying to understand each other and trying to tolerate each other does not necessarily involve agreeing with each other.

### 2023, January 28:

Is reconciliation beyond the archivist's purview? Is it any of our business? Because our environment is made up of "multiple views" (an idea I'm not uncomfortable with) should we simply accept that the divide between the clowns and the ranters may be unbridgeable (understanding that theirs are only two "views" amongst the multiplicity) and proceed as if reconciling them is no business of ours? Or, as Andrew seems to be suggesting, take sides and help one side or another prevail?

Andrew speaks of the "*refusal of White Australia to acknowledge the history of Australia*". On the contrary, I see evidence of that acknowledgement everywhere, especially in our houses of memory. Yet it makes no difference, it seems, to the ranting and the clowning. The gap there doesn't close, it widens. Should we care about that? Provided we are acknowledging that hitherto unacknowledged history it isn't that enough? What matters what others may do? What more can be asked of us? More of the same I suppose.

Memory is never uncontested and maybe this historical battlefield is one we should navigate as we do (or ought to do) any other. Have faith in the record, tell the truth, fill in the gaps, and let others decide what to make of it. Not a doctrine I hear much repeated amongst archivists nowadays. I speak now not of our political posture, what we must do to survive and get along, but of what we believe.

### 2023, January 29:

<<**Andrew Waugh: ... I would hope that histories draw on a range of evidence from a variety of disciplines. For the history of indigenous Australians pre settlement, I'd expect histories to primarily draw on archeological evidence and oral history ...>>**

The [National Museum](#) and other memory houses are taking a wide view of [sources](#), as you would expect. I have some sympathy for AWM which has a long-standing focus on documents (incl. film and images), artefacts, and some oral history but, if they're going to deal with Frontier Wars from now on, they'll have to move with the times, Leaving aside the divisions between pre- and post- European contact (which as Ketelaar and others remind us began in the early C17th not the late C18th) we know that [archival views](#) have also evolved, to some extent at least. There is still a divorce, albeit an increasingly murky one, between [evidence](#) and [knowledge](#) (between "[sources](#)" and "[resources](#)"). What price [Bruce Pascoe](#)?

The traditional distinction between [primary](#) and [secondary](#) sources is still made and the [defining characteristics](#) enumerated for intending scholars. [J M Ward](#) would be pleased ("*all research students should be chained to a desk in Fisher Library for three years*" – apocryphal). Takes me back, so many years ago now, to my time in Fourth Year History





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when, under Ward's leadership, we discussed dangerous ideas not shared with other undergraduates. What is the value of Shakespeare's [History Plays](#) as historical sources? Were they about Plantagenet History or Tudor History? What regard should we have for the [Speeches](#) in Thucydides (which are generally accepted not to have been verbatim)? We didn't discuss [Indigenous Knowledge](#) (bit avant-garde for the Sydney University History Department in the 1960s) but no one would have stopped us if anyone had thought of it – even though the Anthropology Department was just down the hall. But those seminars, in their limited way, were certainly about teaching us to consider “[alternative ways of knowing](#)” outside the narrow boundaries of our discipline.

I am reluctant to use the term record in this context because that leads back to the hoary old question [what is a record?](#) But Andrew can take heart, I think, that the common view of [historical source](#) is now a more expansive one.

### 2023, February 10:

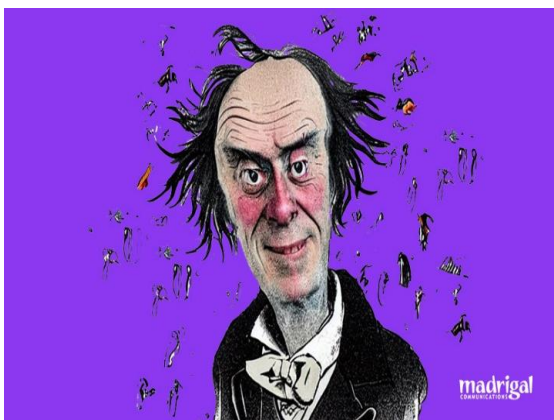
Here's an [example](#) of identity politics of which I was unaware (culpable ignorance on my part, I guess). As the article exemplifies, identity is almost always bound up with [memory](#) (false or otherwise) –

70% reject the idea that historical discrimination contributes to current challenges faced by Black Americans.

### All about words or all about attitudes?

They are trying to [revise Roald Dahl](#) to make him inoffensive. Familiar territory for the [Blyton banners](#):

To address criticisms levelled at Blyton's work, some later editions have been altered to reflect more politically progressive attitudes towards issues such as race, gender, violence between young persons, the treatment of children by adults, and legal changes in Britain as to what is allowable for young children to do in the years since the stories were originally written (e.g. purchasing fireworks); modern reprints of the Noddy series substitute teddy bears or goblins for [golliwogs](#) ... [The Faraway Tree's](#) Dame Slap, who made regular use of corporal punishment, was changed to Dame Snap who no longer did so, and the names of Dick and Fanny in the same series were changed to Rick and Frannie. Characters in the [Malory Towers](#) and [St. Clare's](#) series are no longer [spanked](#) or threatened with a spanking, but are instead scolded. References to George's short hair making her look like a boy were removed in revisions to [Five on a Hike Together](#), reflecting the idea that girls need not have long hair to be considered feminine or normal. Anne of *The Famous Five* stating that boys cannot wear pretty dresses or like girls' dolls was removed ...



If Dick and Fanny are offensive, what is achieved by renaming them Rick and Franny? Why not Liam and Taylor? Thomas Bowdler “lent his name to the English verb **bowdlerise** which means 'to remove words or sections from a book or other work that are



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considered unsuitable or offensive'. The derivative noun is **bowdlerism**. Some examples of alterations made by Bowdler's edition:

- In [Hamlet](#), the death of [Ophelia](#) was called an accidental drowning, not a possibly intended suicide.
- "God!" as an exclamation is replaced with "Heavens!"
- In [Henry IV, Part 2](#), the [prostitute Doll Tearsheet](#) is omitted outright, the slightly more reputable Mistress Quickly retained.

Prominent modern figures such as [Michiko Kakutani](#) (in the [New York Times](#)) and [William Safire](#) (in his book, *How Not to Write*) have accused Bowdler of changing Lady Macbeth's famous "Out, damned spot!" line in [Macbeth](#) to "Out, crimson spot!"<sup>[20]</sup> But Bowdler did not do that. [Thomas Bulfinch](#) and Stephen Bulfinch did, in their 1865 edition of Shakespeare's works."

The issue for us is how to deal with words and/or attitudes deemed offensive in our handling and descriptions of the records that embody them. Our choices include: suppression (access closure), redaction (black-out), contextualisation (in description), etc. (not yet alteration of the record itself, I trust, but when archives become exhibits - who knows?). The indefatigable [Tim Sherratt](#) has had great fun with our kind of bowdlerisation – viz. closed access - e.g. [diy-redactionart](#) ("I started off trying to automatically find redactions in ASIO files, I ended up finding art"). A subtle form of suppression would be confining our use of descriptive metadata to contemporary acceptable language thereby hiding the records from searchers familiar with authentic terminology of the past who looked for records using those forbidden terms but leaving the censorious untroubled.

Charles Dickens bowdlerised himself in relation to [Fagin](#) in later editions of *Oliver Twist* and made amends by introducing [Mr Riah](#) into *Our Mutual Friend*. To say nothing of Shylock (cf. John Gross [Shylock](#) 1994)

### 2023, February 26:

*For there shall be a time when they will not endure sound doctrine but, according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:3-4).*

*... we repudiated all versions of the doctrine of original sin, of there being insane and irrational springs of wickedness in most men. We were not aware that civilisation was a thin and precarious crust erected by the personality and the will of a very few, and only maintained by rules and conventions skilfully put across and guilefully preserved. We had no respect for traditional wisdom or the restraints of custom ... John Maynard Keynes, *My Early Beliefs* (1938)*

Archival descriptions do not have the status of literary texts (still less of scripture or the pronouncements of J M Keynes from an age that pre-dates social media democratisation), but [these issues](#) apply nevertheless. Does cultural sensitivity trump accuracy? When does fact become opinion? Or, opinion become fact for that matter? When does Dogma prevail over Ethics (*pace* Lord Acton)? When does accurate description yield to an obligation to provide "*conversation tools ... to highlight different perspectives and thinking over time.*"

Consider how far the description of any body of records dealing with indigenous life and accounts given of it in the record (invariably by White observers) has to deal with the issues raised by the [Pascoe Thesis](#) (and disputed by others). Does the archivist accept Pascoe's revisionism (lauded in Parliament no less by our current PM and Foreign Minister), blend it into our descriptions of the historic records and incorporate that view, do we mention and endorse it as a "contextualisation", do we mention and rebut it as a falsehood or dubious at best, or do we just say nothing as if it hadn't even been raised? Apparently, it's being taught in schools and universities as authoritative, so the idea that those using the records haven't heard of it is likely to be fanciful. More broadly, in a post-Truth Age, can we



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make, as we once did, broad assumptions about both a scholarly and even a vulgar consensus over unstated observations that are nowadays culturally challenged – a consensus that meant we didn't have to be explicit in our descriptions about what was generally accepted as given and that we could safely ignore flat-earthers and those who think surveillance balloons come from outer space?

*What can you do with college graduates who've never heard of the French Revolution?*

... In Australia, the [publishing] industry has long wrestled with how to handle books deemed to be outdated, with high schools decolonising their collections, audiobook producers editing classics and booksellers arguing for content warnings. Professor of Education at the University of Technology Sydney Rosemary Johnston said Australia had a history of editing children's books – most notably the Billabong books by Mary Grant Bruce, which were changed to remove controversial depictions of Aboriginal people, and Chinese and Irish immigrants ... Johnston said ... "It's really nuanced ... We want that freedom of expression and to maintain the integrity, but we don't want to publish anything dangerous that would impact a child's life."

... President of the Australian School Library Association Natalie Otten said there was a big debate on how to teach context on controversial titles without offending. "Considering the context of the time in which the material was first published can support learners to think about the content and its relevance in today's world," Otten said. "Rather than 'banning' books that are outdated, they can be used as rich conversation tools with learners to highlight different perspectives and thinking over time."

**2023, March 20:**

### Attribution wars

**Aussie or Kiwi?: Phar Lap, Russell Crowe, Pavlovas. And what about that great line of English writers and dramatists: Swift, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Moore, Wilde, Shaw, et al?**

Questions of attribution are constantly under review by art scholars, but rarely are they so topical or heated as institutional efforts underway in the US and in Europe to reclassify art once described as Russian as Ukrainian. In New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has quietly changed the name of an 1899 painting by the French Impressionist [Edgar Degas](#) from Russian Dancer to Dancer in Ukrainian Dress. The Met also holds works by Arkhyp Kuindzhi and Ilya Repin, a 19th-century painter who was born in what is now [Ukraine](#). The artists were previously listed as Russian and are now categorized as Ukrainian. But seascape painter Ivan Aivazovsky, whom the Met had also changed from Russian to Ukrainian, was abruptly relisted as Armenian on Thursday, after an outcry from New York's Armenian community ...

... The reattributions in New York follow moves at the [National Gallery](#) in London last year to change the name of another of Degas' dancer series from Russian Dancers to Ukrainian Dancers ... Similar decisions have been made regarding other artists ... The moves are described by some as part of an effort to correctly attribute the contribution of Ukrainian artists to art history. But they have also been denounced by others ... In a statement, Max Hollein, the director of the Met, said: "The Met's curators and experts are continually researching and examining objects in the collection in order to determine the most appropriate and accurate way to catalogue and present them ...

... The question of whether Degas considered his subjects Russian or Ukrainian has also come into question. By some accounts, the Russian attribution was given by his dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, who bought one of the series from the painter in 1906 ... The dispute ... could now travel farther into literature ... Russian poet Alexander Pushkin's African ancestry, Mikhail Lermontov's Scottish ancestry and German philosopher Immanuel Kant's birthplace in Königsberg, now Kaliningrad, once a German city but later part of the Soviet Union and now of the Russian Federation ... One person involved in the campaign told the Guardian that they had heard some institutions had come under pressure to maintain Russian attributions from the wives of oligarchs who sit on museum boards ...





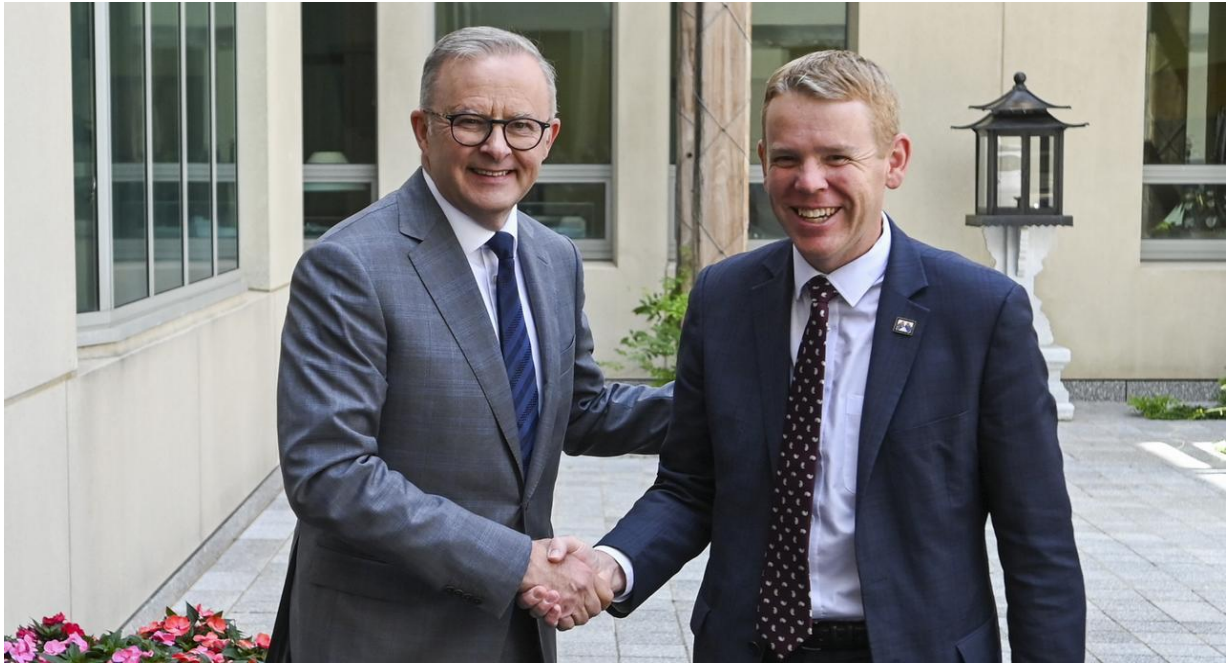
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“As with so many rational decisions, making it more accurate also brings confusion,” notes Charles Stuckey, who has served as curator in major US museums including the [Art](#) Institute of Chicago. “Museums change titles of their works all the time based upon investigations,” Stuckey said. “The timing is suspicious. Are they just doing this at this particular time?” ... “It has to be backed up by some kind of rational to make the change. The field is already very familiar with situations like this because of reattributions of old master art. It does slightly complicate research but so what?”

**2023, May 4:**

*<<As with so many rational decisions, making it more accurate also brings confusion, notes Charles Stuckey>>*

Love it.



### How clever is that?

Here’s an example of how to confuse with accuracy and avoid inflaming differences with words. I don’t usually associate our Prime Minister with cleverness (have you ever heard him say anything of substance?) but I imagine he has clever people to feed him lines. In a reported interview with the egregious Piers Morgan, his advisers have excelled themselves:

- “The New Zealand Prime Minister, Chris Hipkins, was asked to define a woman and he said, ‘Well, people identify for themselves’. He couldn’t answer. It was excruciating, to watch ... What is a woman, Prime Minister?” he asked.
- Mr Albanese replied: “An adult female.”
- Morgan: “How difficult was that to answer?”
- Mr Albanese: “Not too hard. I was asked during the campaign, actually. But I respect people for whoever they are. And it’s up to people to be respectful ...

### Female adj

**1. a(1) :** of, relating to, or being the sex that typically has the capacity to bear young or produce eggs ....

**b:** having a gender identity that is the opposite of male

I’m surprised that Morgan, who is appalling but not stupid, didn’t spot the sleight of hand. The term obviously now has two meanings: one based in biology and the other based in identity. The term “adult female” could mean either. No one’s offended, not even dictionary writers. Perhaps that is the right way to deal with identity-fanatics: use carefully chosen



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words to baffle them with ambiguity, deprive them of nits to pick, turn the tables on them by choosing those terms they themselves have decided to squabble over without indicating which alternative meaning you subscribe to.

Bravo, Albo!

**2023, May 6:**

**<<... I imagine he has clever people to feed him lines  
... No one's offended, not even dictionary writers ...>>**

### **But not clever enough ...**

... his response quickly led to intense debate online, with some accusing the Prime Minister of not acknowledging transgender women in his statement. Trans activist and blogger Eleanor Evans said Mr Albanese used the question as an opportunity to “drop anti-trans dogwhistles while umming and ahing about ‘respect’”. “All through this he couldn’t even bring himself to say the word ‘trans,’” she tweeted. Political reporter Amy Remeikis accused the PM of “legitimising” a “hateful question” ...

*making it more accurate also brings confusion*

- **confusion** noun ... disorder; upheaval; tumult; chaos (*The army retreated in confusion*), lack of clearness or distinctness (*a confusion in his mind between right and wrong*), perplexity; bewilderment (*The more difficult questions left us in complete confusion*), embarrassment or abashment (*He blushed in confusion*).

**2023, May 24:**

**<<Archival descriptions do not have the status of literary texts (still less of scripture or the pronouncements of J M Keynes from an age that pre-dates social media democratisation), but these issues apply nevertheless. Does cultural sensitivity trump accuracy? When does fact become opinion? Or, opinion become fact for that matter? When does Dogma prevail over Ethics (*pace* Lord Acton)? When does accurate description yield to an obligation to provide "conversation tools ... to highlight different perspectives and thinking over time.">>**

Consider collective nouns

As I decline into senility, I am finding time to reflect on the errors of my past. One that I have come to dwell upon is the casual use of the collective in archival description. Over the years, I have used them a lot without much reflection. They clarify, they “smooth” the data by bringing focus to the confusing complexity of what is being described. They assist understanding (I convinced myself) by obscuring individual differences in the service of meaning – highlighting the wood and obscuring the trees. A good thing, surely. But an old man’s wariness of identity wars has now given me pause,

... a new appreciation of how history is decided ... in individual hearts and minds. The Civil War had fascinated me since I was a teenager but most of the books about it seemed to dwell on whose cavalry went charging over which hill ... Or else they treated American society as a collection of broadly defined groups – “the North”, “the South”, “the slaves” – each one mechanically obeying a set of sociological and ideological rules. I realized I already knew from my own experience that this isn’t the way history works. On September 11, 2001, I had observed how everyone I knew responded to the terrorist attacks in his or her own way. The response didn’t derive simply from whether someone was liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat. They also depended on a whole complicated set of personal convictions, fears, character traits, religious beliefs. They depended on where people came from, where they lived, and where they had travelled ... And all these complications influenced not just ordinary people but also those I knew who worked in the media and in government ... the startling events in New York and Washington hadn’t simply changed the course of future history, they had shaken up old categories and assumptions. In a way, they had changed the past just as much as the future; rewritten not only our expectation of what



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

was to come but also our sense of what had gone before ...  
Adam Goodhart [1861: The Civil War Awakening](#) (2012)

One of the things that irks me about The Voice debate – many things irk me about it but this is high on the list – is how so many speak as if Aborigines (and Torres Strait Islanders) are a collective: one group, a homogenous, single identity, of one mind and one voice. There are, surely, many Voices – not just one – defined by situation, heritage, language, experience, location, kinship, and so on. One fault line in that divide is between the marginalised, the [integrated](#) (that's integrated not [assimilated](#)), and the activists. It seems to me that the activists (pro and con) are giving me their opinions and I don't think I'm hearing from the diversity of opinion that common-sense tells me must exist, especially amongst the marginalised.

**2023, May 27:**

### Pronouns

The pronoun wars have been raging around us for at least five or six years now. Like so many toxic developments, this sickness was incubated in the university ... The malady quickly spread, however. Back in 2018, we had occasion to note how the pronoun wars had infected Williams College, always a reliable litmus paper for academic fatuousness, and since then the practice of people “declaring” their pronouns and making up ever more extravagant alternatives for the usual vocables (he, his, she, hers, etc.) has spread far and wide. A couple years ago, the metastasis looked complete, with employees at many businesses—especially “soft” ones like publishing and anything to do with the arts, media, or education—routinely including their “preferred” pronouns in the signature block of their correspondence. The nadir came when the Biden administration added a menu of pronoun choices to the White House website and announced that government employees would be encouraged to pick their own pronouns. Earlier this autumn, the State Department issued an enthusiastic tweet about a glorious new holiday: “International Pronouns Day.” ...

For “at least five or six years”? You bet. Thus, from [A Dictionary of Modern English Usage](#) by H W Fowler 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1965), first published in 1926.

#### **Number**

11. Pronouns and possessives after *each, every, anyone, no one, one*, etc. ... *Each* and the rest are all singular; that is undisputed; in a perfect language there would exist pronouns and possessives that were of as doubtful gender as they and yet were, like them, singular; i.e., it would have words meaning him-or-her, himself-or-herself, his-or-her. But, just as French lacks our power of distinguishing (without additional words) between his, her, and its, so we lack the French power of saying in one word his-or-her. There are three makeshifts: first, *as anybody can see for himself or herself*; second, *as anybody can see for themselves*; and third, *as anybody can see for himself*. No one who can help it chooses the first; it is correct, and it is sometimes necessary, but it is so clumsy as to be ridiculous except when explicitness is urgent, and it usually sounds like a bit of pedantic humour. The second is the popular solution; it sets the literary man's teeth on edge, and he exerts himself to give the same meaning in some entirely different way if he is not prepared to risk the third, which is here recommended. It involves the convention (statutory in the interpretation of documents) that where the matter of sex is not conspicuous or important the masculine form shall be allowed to represent a person instead of a man, or say a man (homo) instead of a man (vir). Whether that convention, with himself or herself in the background for especial exactitudes, and paraphrase always possible in dubious cases, is an arrogant demand on the part of male England, everyone must decide for himself (or for himself or herself, or for themselves). Have the patrons of *they* etc. made up their minds yet between *Everyone was blowing their noses* (or *nose*) and *Everyone were blowing their noses*? ... (p.404)





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### they, them, their

1. *One* etc. followed by *their* etc. ... Undoubtedly grammar rebels against *their*; and the reason for using it is clearly reluctance to recognize that, though the reference may be to both sexes, the right shortening of the cumbersome *he or she, his or her, etc.*, is *he* or *him* or *his*, as *his* and *him* are used with a boldness surprising in a government department in *There must be opportunity for the individual boy or girl to go as far as his keenness and ability will take him*. Whether that reluctance is less felt by the male is doubtful; at any rate the OED quotes examples from Fielding (*Everyone in the house were in their beds*), Goldsmith, Sydney Smith, Thackeray (*A person can't help their birth*), and Bernard Shaw. It also says nothing more severe of the use than that it is 'Not favoured by grammarians'. In colloquial usage the inconvenience of having no common-sex personal pronoun in the singular has proved stronger than respect for the grammarians, and the one that is available in the plural is made to serve for the singular too. But in prose their disfavour is not treated so lightly; few good modern writers would flout them so conspicuously as Fielding and Thackeray ... or as Ruskin in *I am never angry with anyone unless they deserve it ...* (p.635)



Prefer the familiar word to the far-fetched. Prefer the concrete word to the abstract. Prefer the single word to the circumlocution. Prefer the short word to the long. Prefer the Saxon word to the Romance.

— Henry Watson Fowler —

AZ QUOTES

How strange that something once regarded as a “*bit of pedantic humour*” might nowadays be imposed on one (or on anybody) as a form of humourless bullying. Our pronoun zealotry differs from that of the past only in the fanaticism and invective with which it is enforced. One wonders how the grammar check in Word is handling all this.

In his Introduction to the second edition, Ernest Gowers remarks:

... It is not that all Fowler's opinions are unchallengeable. Many have been challenged. It is not that he is always easy reading. At his best he is incomparable. But he never forgot what he calls 'that persistent fellow the critical reader' who is 'not satisfied with catching the general drift and obvious intention of a sentence' but insists that 'the words used ... must actually yield on scrutiny the desired sense'. There are some passages that only yield it after what the reader may think an excessive amount of scrutiny – passages demanding hardly less concentration than one of the more obscure sections of a Finance Act, and for the same reason; the determination of the writer to make sure that, when the reader eventually gropes his way to a meaning, it shall be, beyond all possible doubt, the meaning intended by the writer ...

The present conflict (these things invariably blow over eventually) seems irreconcilable between [demands for respect](#) and [objections to enforcement](#).

**2023, August 1:**

### Lies, damn lies, and reinterpretation

“After all,” said the Duchess vaguely, “there are certain things you can't get away from. Right and wrong, good conduct and moral rectitude, have certain well-defined limits.” “So, for the matter of that,” replied Reginald, “has the Russian Empire. The trouble is that the limits are not always in the same place.”



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I'm often surprised by the people other people choose to marry and the things other people choose to care about – tulips, the Trinity, pronouns, that sort of thing. Statues (and other artefacts commemorating the past, such as cottages) have been coming in for a lot of attention. Historical records too. In Hobart, they're deplatforming [William Crowther](#) (an appropriate term since they seem to be leaving the plinth behind). Got me wondering why. Is it because he stole a head and misused it or because the head he stole was Aboriginal? Would it make a difference if the body part had been non-Aboriginal – as, apparently, were those taken by Crowther's son (Edward, who stole non-Aboriginal heads but who doesn't have a statue)?

Is it about what Crowther did or what he represents (to us and to those we don't like and want to discomfit)? Is the focus on provenance (a narrow view of the artefact's place in the historical process) or ambience (a larger understanding of its place within a network of relationships)? What kind of malefaction leads to [damnatio memoriae](#)? For that matter, what perceived virtues lead to enduring commemoration? How are *damnatio* and commemoration related to [historical negationism](#)? The Crowther Affair is (according to Hobart City Council) unashamedly an act of "reinterpretation", replacing a wrong or limited view with one they obviously believe to be worthy. It reflects today's view that yesterday got it wrong (and, by implication, that today has got it right). But is there ever a final word? Will tomorrow's view be different and tomorrow's "reinterpretation" seek to refine or even extinguish today's verities?

*It is dreadful to think that other peoples' grandchildren may one day rise up and call one amiable. There are moments when one sympathises with Herod.*



### Some issues:

1. How valid is the contention that reinterpretation is a recalibration of the [grand narrative](#) rather than just a passing fancy? Have zealots lost sight of the original meaning of "the [history of the present](#)" by disavowing the genealogy of ideas in favour of overthrow and triumph? Was [Hegel](#), rather than Nietzsche, a truer expositor of the fluidity found in the [genealogy of ideas](#) in opposition to the certainty of [ideology](#)? Does the evolution of history ever come to a full stop?

*Fukuyama argues that history should be viewed as an evolutionary process, and that the end of history, in this sense, means that liberal democracy is the final form of government for all nations. According to Fukuyama, since the French Revolution, liberal democracy has repeatedly proven to be a fundamentally better system (ethically, politically, economically) than any of the alternatives, and so there can be no progression from it to an alternative system.*

2. What role do artefacts (and historical records) play in working through current issues (e.g. reconciliation)? Are statues simply commemorative? Are records simply evidential?



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The lord mayor, Anna Reynolds, described it as a practical and meaningful step to reconciliation and part of a broader national conversation. “(This) does not change history. The records, the books, the articles, the stories all remain unchanged,” said told the meeting. “We don’t want to celebrate a time in our history when scientists and doctors wanted to prove theories of European superiority (and) wanted to rank people by their race. “It was an appalling tradition.” ... Reynolds said the statue would be conserved and potentially reinterpreted. The meeting was told preliminary discussions have been held with the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

3. Is it all about power? Who decides which interpretation prevails? Is it about who owns the record or who owns the meaning of the record?

*Museums and other cultural institutions ... are publicly trusted sources of information and knowledge ... the Australian Museum’s executive leadership team and Trustees [are] providing First Nations peoples with a platform to be heard and rebalance the narrative ... it is important that First Nations peoples control how our cultures, experiences and world views are interpreted in museums.*

4. What room is left for nuance and contestation? Are our interpretations binary alternatives (yes/no, on/off, right/wrong) or parallel views (“more than one provenance at once”)?

*Alderman Simon Behrakis voted against the statue’s removal, saying history should be preserved “warts and all”. “That statue didn’t go up celebrating the horrors and appalling acts committed. It celebrated a man’s contribution to the state,” he said. “Removing the statue does sanitise history. We don’t learn anything from history if it is hidden away.”*

5. Is provenance about “ownership, custody or location” whose primary purpose

*... is normally to provide contextual and circumstantial evidence for its original production or discovery, by establishing, as far as practicable, its later history, especially the sequences of its formal ownership, custody and places of storage. The practice has a particular value in helping authenticate objects ... The term refers to the individuals, groups, or organizations that originally created or received the items in an accumulation of records, and to the items’ subsequent chain of custody. The principle of provenance [is] a major strand in the broader principle of respect des fonds) stipulates that records originating from a common source (or fonds) should be kept together ... The authority of an archival document or set of documents of which the provenance is uncertain (because of gaps in the recorded chain of custody) will be considered to be severely compromised ...*

or, is it about retrospective exegesis rather than historical origins? What, if anything, **cannot** be assigned as provenance? Are there any allowable limits in the identification of Parallel Provenance or are the boundaries of Ambience like those of the Russian Empire?

**2023, August 2:**

**<<Is the focus on provenance (a narrow view of the artefact’s place in the historical process) or ambience (a larger understanding of its place within a network of relationships)?>>**

I’ve been chastised for this. I had hoped, by now, that a fuller explication was unnecessary. If not, here it is:

Provenance and Ambience are scaleable. Bearing in mind that “creation” is a much more complex concept than traditionally supposed in archival thought, you can have Provenance residing in the creator-of-the-fonds, creator-of-the-series, creator-of-the-file (item), creator-of-the-document, creator-of-the-keystroke, creator-of-the-artefact, etc., etc., etc. For each of these, there will be a corresponding Ambience: ambience-of-the-creator-of-the fonds, ambience-of-the-creator-of-the series .... ambience-of-the-creator-of-the-document .... etc., etc., etc. It is still an open question (in my view) whether it is mechanically possible to relate Ambience (of the Creator) to the Record or Ambience (of the Creator) to the Function; it is certainly possible to do so imaginatively and it would be desirable to be





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able to do so in reality. No real-world system could, of course, possibly hard-wire in all the possible relationship-types, but it should be possible to build a system flexible enough to allow users to pick and choose.

Conceptually, therefore, an Ambience-to-Provenance relationship is part of the demonstration of traditional archival thinking about the internal structure of the Doer. Corresponding demonstrations are possible for the internal structure of the Document and the Deed. The unresolved question, to my mind, at least so far as any real-world descriptive system of which I am aware, is whether Document, Deed, and Doer are bedrock concepts with no possibility of relationships being made (systematically) between the entities composing their internal structures – e.g. Person<to>Action. Such relationships would be highly desirable and I would be surprised if someone isn't already doing it but I am out of things now so I just don't know.

**PS** (sigh). Yes, it goes w/o saying that any of these relationships can be multiple (many-to-many) rather than singular. It's the skill of the descriptive archivist in crafting the relationships, not the rules under which they are displayed, that matters most - hence the significance of finding Truth (incl. parallel truths) amongst lies, damn lies, and reinterpretation, and the significance of having a view about the limits of the Russian Empire.

**2023, August 10:**

*Diversity used to mean the creation of a space for dissent and disagreement and tolerance the willingness to live with things that one might find offensive or distasteful. Now, diversity too often describes a space in which dissent and disagreement have to be expunged in the name of "respect" and tolerance requires one to refrain from saying or doing things that might be deemed offensive. It is time we re-grasped both diversity and tolerance in their original sense. [Kenan Malik](#)*

Is it the job of a house of memory to uphold "diversity and tolerance" and, if so, in what sense of the meaning of those terms?



### **Museum of Pop Culture airbrushes J K Rowling out of Harry Potter exhibition**

A Seattle Museum has airbrushed JK Rowling from its hall of fame and Harry Potter exhibition ... [for] holding 'super hateful and divisive' opinions ... The museum still has Harry Potter memorabilia on display but any mention of the author of the franchise has been airbrushed ... Its exhibitions project manager Chris Moore ... accused the author of using 'racial stereotypes', 'fat-shaming' and a 'lack of LGBTQIA+ representation' in the books ... A MoPOP spokesman said ... 'MoPOP ... stands with nonbinary and transgender communities.



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

In an increasingly divided world, pop culture can unite, inspire, and spark important conversations ... in our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, we strive to elevate those that are left out of the mainstream ... by amplifying voices and stories that are not always seen on museum walls.' ...

Do nonbinary and transgender communities actually demand that of us – to erase people and facts from museum walls, from collections, from the record? Or, are activist curators misapplying “woke” ideas to suit their own prejudices? [Woke](#) was originally about heightening awareness, not about suppressing knowledge of those you disapprove of, but under the impulse of [critical theory](#) it becomes something else.

By 2020, many on the political right and some in the center in several Western countries began sarcastically using the term as a pejorative for various leftist and progressive movements and ideologies they perceived as overzealous, performative, or insincere. In turn, some commentators came to consider *woke* an offensive term that disparages persons who promote progressive ideas involving identity and race. Since then, derivative terms such as *woke-washing* and *woke capitalism* were coined to describe the conduct of persons or entities who signal support for progressive causes rather than working toward genuine change.

Zealously taking sides makes us [activists](#) in that struggle. It gives us a purpose, but is it the right one? If we are to be activists, what should we be activist about? How do we decide which side to take? How do we judge the effect of what we are doing? Fundamentally, what is our role? Who is it that we “unite” and “inspire” when we stand with “communities” on one side in a culture war? Is that the way to “spark important conversations” in an increasingly divided world? Or, are we simply indulging in [performative activism](#) and feeling virtuous about it? Are we helping anyone other than ourselves? Yes, reply the activists, basking in the gratitude of hitherto marginalised communities, but what those communities really need to hear is not that we are on their side but that truth is on their side (or not, if uncomfortably that turns out to be the case) and that we can be trusted to help them find it.

**Jonas:** That’s death.

**Giver:** He doesn’t know what he’s doing.

**Jonas:** Doesn’t know what he’s doing? He killed him!

**Giver:** But he doesn’t know what it means. Just like you didn’t ...

**Jonas:** How can he not see that the baby isn’t moving? Doesn’t that tell him that something is wrong? ...

**Giver:** Your friend Fiona ... she will soon be trained to release as well.

**Jonas:** That’s a lie! She’d never do that. If Fiona understood ...

**Giver:** We are the only ones who understand it.

**Jonas:** Then it’s our fault. You and me and all the Receivers back and back and back ... There has to be a way to show them. To give them a memory so they can understand.

★

★

★

**Jonas:** [I wish I had been there when the memories returned](#). They were the Truth. The Elders with their Rules are the Lie. So, I do not apologise ... From far behind me, from the place I had left, I thought I heard music too. Perhaps it was only an echo. But it was enough.

*[The Giver](#)*

In a larger sense, then, what is the struggle that we should choose to be activists in? Do we have an archival theory to put up against the more domineering demands of critical theory? Is our ethos no more inspiring than a concern for “*content to be exploited or context to be illuminated*”? Or, as [Terry Eastwood](#) argues, is our mystery (the essence of who we are and what we are trying to do) that we are a “knowledge-building” discipline -

... the theory consists of ideas about the object under contemplation, the method consists of ideas about how to proceed in contemplating the object, and practice consists in the application of theory and method to extend knowledge ...



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Of course, archivists are not excused from having a social conscience, and I have no doubt that a great deal of worthwhile work is being done with engagement between houses of memory and the hitherto marginalised, but I don't see anything to admire in the words and actions of Chris Moore.

**2023, August 17:**

<< **If we are to be activists, what should we be activist about?**

**How do we decide which side to take?>>**

*They say, best men are moulded out of faults.  
And, for the most, become much more the better  
For being a little bad.*

In 2020, Princeton expunged the name of Woodrow Wilson, the University's former President (and the 28<sup>th</sup> POTUS), from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, and Wilson College.

*... The university's board of trustees found that Wilson's "racist thinking and policies make him an inappropriate namesake for a school or college whose scholars, students and alumni must stand firmly against racism in all its forms," ... The decision in June [2020] contrasted with a vote by Princeton trustees in 2016 to keep Wilson's name on campus buildings and programs, despite student protests that led to a review of his legacy there.*

But, oh! what a tangled web -

*... a new Princeton residential college will be built and named after Mellody Hobson, a prominent Black alumna ... Last year [2019], Princeton honored Ms. Hobson with the Woodrow Wilson Award, the university's highest honor for undergraduate alumni. During her acceptance speech, Ms. Hobson reflected on her experiences as a Black student at Princeton and remarked that receiving the Woodrow Wilson Award as a woman of color "requires some cognitive dissonance," The Daily Princetonian reported ... Ms. Hobson studied at the school of international relations and public policy, then named after Wilson ...*



### **In Praise of Old Nassau**

The Award, Princeton explained, cannot be renamed because it-

*... unlike either the College or the School, is the result of a gift. When the University accepted the gift, it took on a legal obligation to name the prize for Wilson and honor his "conviction that education is for 'use' and ... the high aims expressed in his memorable phrase, 'Princeton in the Nation's Service.'" The University will continue to recognize extraordinary public service by conferring the award as currently named. The award explicitly honors specific and positive aspects of Wilson's career, and it, unlike the School or the College, does*





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*not require students to identify with the Wilson name in connection with their academic or residential programs.*

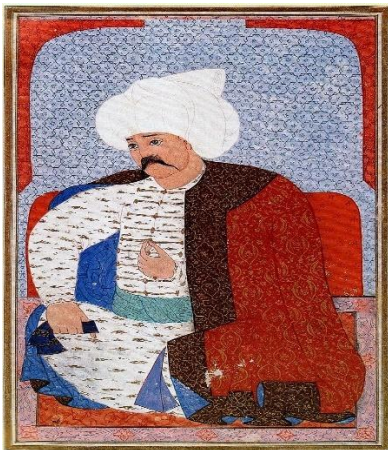
No need for any “cognitive dissonance” after all.

Reducing Wilson’s [legacy](#) to just one thing is clearly disproportionate; it says more about the critics’ lack of judgement than it does about him (though it probably doesn’t help that Richard Nixon was a fan, apparently). Memorialisation in a statue or building requires that a binary view be taken of the subject. Was he a “great man” or a villain? Should he be acclaimed or [debased](#)? Erecting a statue (or naming a college) literally casts a judgement about an historical figure in stone (or, at least, in bricks and mortar) but one can take some comfort in observing the [fluctuating fortunes](#) of those who must submit to the fickleness of scholarship. Historical evaluation requires a more subtle balancing of the good with the bad than can be had from a statue. Wilson can be [condemned](#) for more than just racism – why stop at [grubby politicking](#) and not add [responsibility](#) for WW2 and the current world order?

It is sometimes said (mistakenly) that villains must be judged according to their own time and mores and not ours. [Joseph Conrad](#) had a more subtle and insightful take on this-

*... the most terrifying reflection (I am speaking now for myself) is that all these people are not the product of the exceptional but of the general – of the normality of their place, and time and race.*

Archivists have a huge stake in the debates over [historicism](#) – e.g. whether or not “every argument or idea [is] completely accounted for by its historical context, as opposed to assessing it by its merits”. Do we appraise according to the values of the time in which records are created or our own (or, even more daringly, according to our anticipation of those to come – those which will displace ours). Or, do we believe in universal, timeless values that we are fortunate enough to have recognised? Statue suppression (like historical appraisal) involves assessing merit out of context (beyond the normality of their place, and time and race). But simply reducing our understanding of the past to a reflection of our own periodic frenzies can’t be right either.



**Selim the Grim**



**Patricia Karvelas**

There are, of course, those (living or dead) so far beyond the pale of admiration that one would not dream of erecting a statue to them - Hitler, Genghis Khan, Selim the Grim, Malcolm Turnbull, Patricia Karvelas, etc., etc – but, for the rest of us, to arrive at a true appraisal you have to take the good with the bad –

***Use every man after his just desert, and who should 'scape whipping?***

To what extent, then, is archival appraisal like memorialisation rather than nuanced historical judgement? After all, records can’t get more cancelled than being appraised as non-permanent and consigned to total obliteration.



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**PS** There are, in fact, statues erected to Genghis Khan, including [quite a big one](#) in Mongolia I believe. For that matter, Selim the Grim can be found memorialised amongst the [Fethiye Statues](#). And, I suppose, Malcolm Turnbull gets a portrait in Parliament House. One can only hope, however, that Patricia will eventually slide into well-merited oblivion but maybe not if the others are anything to go by.

**2023, August 19:**

An article about all this in the [Conversation](#). The editors found it a “nuanced argument push[ing] past the facile culture-war framing that serves only to polarise and pre-judge.” I found it indecisive and unconvincing. Judge for yourself. Some snippets-

This year, there has been some controversy about the rewriting of passages from authors such as [Roald Dahl](#), [Enid Blyton](#), [Ian Fleming](#) and [Agatha Christie](#) with the aim of removing potentially offensive material. Some publishers have also adopted the precautionary measure of adding content warnings and disclaimers to books by [Ernest Hemingway](#), [Virginia Woolf](#), [Raymond Chandler](#) and [P.G. Wodehouse](#) ... Those who would clean up the classics, and their conservative opponents, are entangled in a moral battle which encourages the application of the same ethical criteria to books that might be apply to elected officials or ministers of religion ... if book-talk most easily rises to the level of public discussion when it involves a simple moral controversy, then we are inexorably incorporating literature into the sepia mass of monetised cultural gruel of which our society appears increasingly to comprise ...

... a moral judgement has the power to bestow a final endorsement or condemnation, meaning one can avoid what [Keats described as negative capability](#): “being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”. A capacity to cope with the unpleasantness of irresolution could be taken as a mark of maturity. The desire for certainty, for a world of unambiguously demarcated ethical boundaries of the kind found in much young adult fiction, could be described as a reassuring childish fantasy ... The best literature can be spiky, ambiguous, difficult, cruel, strange, unpredictable, hectoring and unpleasant. It is not the job of a book to ease the life of its reader. Reading a good book might mean having a terrible day, a day in which you are scared, sad, distressed ... there is nothing wrong with trying to avoid offence ... any social interaction requires us to calculate what it is permissible to say, and there are many remarks we refrain from making for fear they might hurt ... [but] ... Any argument that treats literature as fundamentally therapeutic, self-improving or society-improving, risks reducing literature to self-help ... To approach literature as a machine for self-improvement is to share ground with the bad-faith arguments of those who justify their bigoted moralising by referring to the cultural achievements of Western civilisation ... no book will condemn or redeem us ... because books do not exist without readers, and each reader is an unpredictable variable ...

So, if not on moral terms, how might we defend literature? We can liken it to conversation. A conversation can be morally nourishing or deadening. It is neither good nor bad. Conversations are surely responsible for some of history’s worst atrocities, along with its most wondrous achievements. And clearly we cannot stop having conversations, whether we wish to or not ...

My own view is that both imaginative literature and historical understanding unavoidably involve moral judgements. Otherwise, how could a “conversation” be morally nourishing?

**2023, August 23:**

Reverting to the first post in this very long thread (“There is uproar over use of the word “[occupation](#)” to describe the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453”), there an [article](#) in *Al Jazeera* deploring the lack of interest in Ottoman history amongst Arab scholars (and the lack of skills they need to do so) –

... Nation-building took place as a narrow ethno-religious understanding of nationhood came to dominate the region, sidelining multicultural identities that had been the norm for centuries. Former Ottoman officials had to reinvent themselves as Arab, Syrian,



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or Lebanese, etc national leaders in the face of French and British colonialism ... These visions of an ethno-national future necessitated the “forgetting” of the recent Ottoman past. Narratives of imagined primordial nations left no room for the stories of our great-grandparents and their parents, generations of people that lived part of their lives in a different geopolitical reality, and who would never be given the space to acknowledge the loss of the only reality they understood ...

... We need to reclaim Ottoman history as a local history of the inhabitants of the Arabic-speaking-majority lands because if we do not claim and unpack the recent past, it would be impossible to truly understand the problems that we are facing today, in all their temporal and regional dimensions. The call for local students of history to research, write, and analyse the recent Ottoman reality is in no way a nostalgic call to return to some imagined days of a glorious or harmonious imperial past. In fact, it is the complete opposite. It is a call to uncover and come to terms with the good, the bad, and, indeed, the very ugly imperial past that people in the Arabic-speaking-majority parts of the Middle East were also the makers of. The long and storied histories of the people of cities that flourished during the Ottoman period, like Tripoli, Aleppo, and Basra, have yet to be (re)written.

... We must ask ourselves why is it that researchers from Arabic-speaking-majority countries frequent French and English imperial archives, but do not spend the time or the resources to learn Ottoman-Turkish in order to take advantage of four centuries worth of records readily available at the Ottoman imperial archives in Istanbul or local archives in former provincial capitals? ... Millions of records in Ottoman-Turkish await students from across the Arabic-speaking-majority world to take the plunge into serious research that uses the full range of sources, both on the local and imperial levels ... the number of local historians and students with Ottoman history-related disciplinary and linguistic training, in cities such as Doha, Cairo, and Beirut, which have a concentration of excellent institutions of higher education, is alarmingly low; some universities do not even have such cadres ...

When studying at UCL in 1974/75, I observed how the English archives students needed language and diplomatic skills that we, the overseas students, were spared. It was around this time I disgraced myself by remarking that *once you’ve seen one illuminated manuscript you’ve seen them all*. Goes back to the time, I suppose, when Latin was the [lingua franca](#) in Europe.

Even after the fall of Western Rome, Latin was the common language of international communication, science, scholarship and academia in Europe until well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when other regional vernaculars (including its own descendants, the Romance languages) supplanted it in common academic and political usage, and it eventually became a dead language in the modern linguistic definition.

... and, for those of us old enough to remember, when you could walk into a Catholic church anywhere in the world on any Sunday and [follow what was going on](#). In high school, I had coaching in Latin from the local parish priest and I was much-criticised in class for my use of [ecclesiastical Latin](#). It mattered not because I was a lousy Latinist anyway. Has anyone ever done an audit on what languages there are to be found in Australian archival and manuscript repositories?

### 2023, September 1:

<<In Hobart, they’re deplatforming [William Crowther](#) (an appropriate term since they seem to be leaving the plinth behind). Got me wondering why ... Is it about what Crowther did or what he represents (to us and to those we don’t like and want to discomfit)?>>

At least one descendant thinks she’s being guilted for her ancestors’ bad deeds. A British ex-MP is [trying to erase](#) an academic reference to her descent from slavers. The arguments used to justify the erasure are fascinating:

- concerns that the ex-MP is being “singled out”
- “factual inaccuracies” (e.g. the ex-MP no longer lives in Wales)





## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

- breach of privacy and the right to be forgotten
- ignores position of 19<sup>th</sup> century women (lack of agency)
- “ongoing data breaches” that compromise her personal safety

The reference to her is apparently contained in a footnote and the irony is that if she didn't make an issue of it, the notoriety would probably be much less. Should a person be ashamed and distressed because of what someone else did to those now dead? Is guilt inter-generational? Is reparation for [historical injustice](#) different from reparation [to living victims](#)? Is inherited guilt (or shame) another dimension, perhaps, to the [trauma-informed approach](#).

**<<Should a person be ashamed and distressed because of what someone else did to those now dead?>>**

The King never dies; corporations never die; but people do. [Transgenerational trauma](#) (applied culturally) seems to be based on the proposition that a family never dies, a culture never dies, and a race never dies (with the attendant consequences) and on the argument that [responsibility for historical wrongs](#) lingers on. I am of Celtic origin (partly), so on that basis I have a living grievance against the English, the Danes, and the Saxons. As for the Italians – Wheew! That theory would also justify two thousand years of anti-semitism based on [Matthew 27:25](#).

**PS** For a relationships tragic like me, the idea that everything that has gone before continues as part of the present is a beguiling one.

*The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion* [Albert Einstein](#)

*The past exists only in our memories, the future only in our plans. The present is our only reality* [Robert M Pirsig](#)

**<<Andrew Waugh: ... Personally, my view is that an appropriate treatment of Crowther's statue would be to roughly remove the head and place it in a museum dealing with Australia's treatment of Indigenous peoples with an appropriate contextual description ... it's worth noting how commemorations are created. Some person or group of people, for their own purposes, decide that something is worth commemorating. They have enough power to enact that decision, including commanding enough resources (money) to make the commemoration ... Your position seems to be that, someone having created the commemoration, everyone coming after that is bound by the decision. Even if the community subsequently decides that, really, the person or event should not be commemorated ... >>**

**<<Your position seems to be that, someone having created the commemoration, everyone coming after that is bound by the decision.>>**

Not my position at all.

I believe interpretation (all interpretation, including statues, and hence all archival description) should be provisional, contested, and nuanced – rejecting the binary in favour of multiplicity. I don't believe in censorship and erasure because it is they that are trying to bind me (and everyone else) to a decision taken by those who think they have the right to the final say (or, as we used to have it, who think they have God on their side).

You can't contest something that isn't there anymore (or is now headless).

**<<Indeed, it is quite possible that erection of the statue was deliberately undertaken as a 'final' comment by his family or friends on his community standing despite the scandal of desecrating a dead body. Hobart society was very small.>>**

According to the Hobart City councillor who opposed the removal (Louise Elliot), the statue was raised [by public subscription](#) to which “the whole Tasmanian community” donated -



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

Councillor Elliott told Andrew Bolt that the former Tasmanian premier was adored by the community and the removal of his statue would set a “dangerous precedent.” “Dr Crowther was loved by the whole Tasmanian community, not just Hobart, he was loved because he provided medical care for free regardless of who they were or class,” Ms Elliot said.

**<< I don't believe in censorship and erasure because it is they that are trying to bind me (and everyone else) to a decision taken by those who think they have the right to the final say (or, as we used to have it, who think they have God on their side)>>**

How's this for a bit of contestation?

*... Identifying the villains of history is part of a growing movement of 'decolonialisation' sweeping Australia which aims to rid the country of all statues or memorials associated with deeds or words now deemed to dishonour Australian identity. Statue-toppling protesters have decreed that Australian history has to be corrected — an exercise they like to describe as 'truth telling' — and the stigma of colonialism eradicated ... decolonialisation activists reject the notion of empirical truth and instead see history as a weapon with which to achieve certain political objectives. For the decolonisers, knowledge is always culturally conditioned by power, and truth is a subjective, 'felt' experience. However, when it comes to handing out moral judgments, decolonising activists do find the idea of objective standards of truth useful, after all. In fact, they assert that their 21<sup>st</sup> century assessment of moral truth is absolute, eternal, and binding on all past ages ...*

It is said to be about freedom –

*Decolonization is about “cultural, psychological, and economic freedom” for Indigenous people with the goal of achieving Indigenous sovereignty -- the right and ability of Indigenous people to practice self-determination over their land, cultures, and political and economic systems.*

and about reappraisal –

*Decolonisation is not simply the relocation of a statue or an object; it is a long-term process that seeks to recognise the integral role of empire in museums – from their creation to the present day. Decolonisation requires a reappraisal of our institutions and their history and an effort to address colonial structures and approaches to all areas of museum work.*

but also to be a “new form of Western elitism that risks turning campuses into ideological boot camps” –

*... Is it the work of the colonised, or is it in fact the work, once again, of the colonisers? ... “Decolonising” is not the same thing as diversification. It goes beyond the proposal that academic staff widen the range and viewpoint of their reading lists, or teach about racism and empire more ... Neither do decolonisers just say that we should ask questions about where, how or for whom knowledge is produced. Scholars have been doing so for years. The decolonising movement is a more far-reaching, stark attempt to transform consciousness itself. Its proponents urge teachers to recognise that knowledge can only ever be a product of power relations, that the Enlightenment tradition is defined primarily by its complicity in empire, and that as a way of thinking and educating, it is culturally specific to a privileged Western overclass. Further, as disciplines from political science to archaeology to mathematics are historically implicated in imperial oppression, they are forever tainted and complicit in racial inequality now, and must be overhauled — or dismantled. In order to disrupt inequitable power relations, we thus need different kinds of knowledge ...*

and way out there is *The Ideology of Tyranny: Bataille, Foucault, and the postmodern corruption of political dissent* –

*"The Ideology of Tyranny traces the contemporary jargon of political correctness and the so-called 'politics of diversity' so prevalent in the academic and administrative discourse of the United States to the fantastic sociology of an obscure French pornographer, Georges Bataille (1897-1962). The celebration of violence sung in his works, re-elaborated in abstract form by the late followers of Bataille, has led to the creation of a peculiar talk emphasizing difference,*



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antagonism, intellectual despair, and a profound political conservatism. As the so-called Left has lately come to adopt this troubling gospel of divisiveness, the consequence for a wholesome culture of dissent in our society have been a disastrous paralysis of its critical and moral faculties in the face of a new dawn of never-ending wars."--BOOK JACKET.

**<<... decolonialisation activists reject the notion of empirical truth and instead see history as a weapon with which to achieve certain political objectives ... when it comes to handing out moral judgments, decolonising activists ... assert that their 21<sup>st</sup> century assessment of moral truth is absolute, eternal, and binding ...>>**

I think the shallow extremism of “decolonialisation” begets an equally shallow and equally extreme reaction and that the clash between them takes us further than ever from the truth. That’s also more-or-less what I think about The Voice. Ideology has never appealed to me.

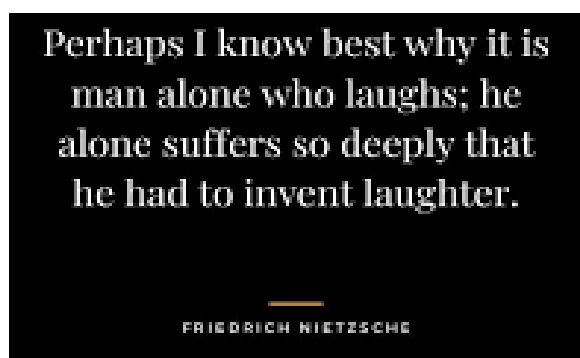
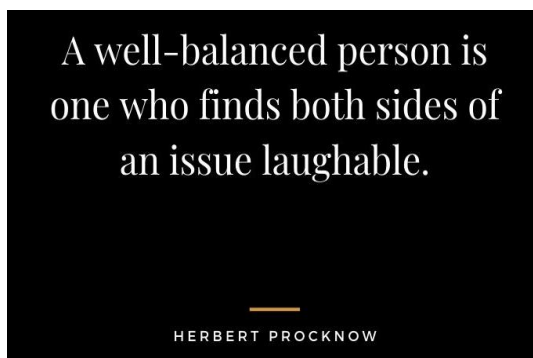
*There’s definitely an obstacle in developing a brand for yourself  
that people can rely on when you’re so eclectic* [Fred Durst](#)

Or a brand that people can even understand, it seems. When I was younger, free speech was a left-wing issue, now it belongs to the right. Very strange - but not too upsetting for an old archivist sliding into his dotage who has never deviated from his passion for free speech regardless of the ideological ramifications. The only ideological connection I see is with [freedom of thought](#).

*I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.*

I’m more upset these days by my unending war with the packaging industry (and car parks). Over the years, people with seriously fretful faces (or do I mean fretfully serious faces) or else with faces empurpled with rage have tried to convince me of the underlying logic of their positions on what I insist on regarding as eclectic issues. I could never see it. Soon, however, when I stand before God (if there is a God) I shall expect Him to explain it all for me – but He’d better expect a few probing questions. That’s all I’m saying.

Parallel provenance, I believe, is about understanding truth in different ways – *rejecting the binary in favour of multiplicity*. It’s not about displacing one “truth” with another. The danger is that insistent [eclecticism](#) used as a weapon with which to achieve certain political objectives can itself be mistaken for just another ideological position unless it is tempered with good humour and a sense of proportion –



*A wonderful thing about true laughter is that it just destroys any kind of system of dividing people* [John Cleese](#)

**2023, September 12:**

**<< I believe interpretation (all interpretation, including statues, and hence all archival description) should be provisional, contested, and nuanced.>>**

But maybe it would be better to put [some self-imposed limits](#) on one’s beliefs.

The *Guardian* [reports](#)-





## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

A bronze statue of “Iron Felix” Dzerzhinsky, the ruthless founder of the Soviet secret police and [architect of the Red Terror](#) that followed the 1917 revolution, has been unveiled at the headquarters of Russia’s foreign spy service ... After the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, his statue was toppled to cheers in Poland and as the Soviet Union itself crumbled in [1991 a monument to Dzerzhinsky outside the KGB headquarters on Lubyanka Square in Moscow was toppled](#) amid rejoicing by many ... For some Russians, the return of Dzerzhinsky to such a public pedestal is an indicator of the repression they say prevails in wartime Russia – and the extent to which the country has abandoned its post-Soviet pivot towards the west.

“Dzerzhinsky is a symbol of repression and lawlessness,” Nikita Petrov, a historian at the Memorial human rights group which won a share of the Nobel peace prize in 2022 a year after being banned and dissolved in Russia, told Reuters ... As Lenin’s and then Stalin’s secret police chief from 1917 until his death in 1926, Dzerzhinsky led the campaign of intimidation, arrests, violence and executions which became known as the “Red Terror” ... “The image of the chairman of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission has become one of the symbols of its time, the standard of crystal honesty, dedication and loyalty to duty,” [Sergei Naryshkin, the chief of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), successor to the KGB’s famed First Chief Directorate] said. “He remained faithful to his ideals to the end - the ideals of goodness and justice” ...



[He's back](#)

**2023, October 23:**

**<< *My own view is that both imaginative literature and historical understanding unavoidably involve moral judgements. 19 August, 2023*>>**

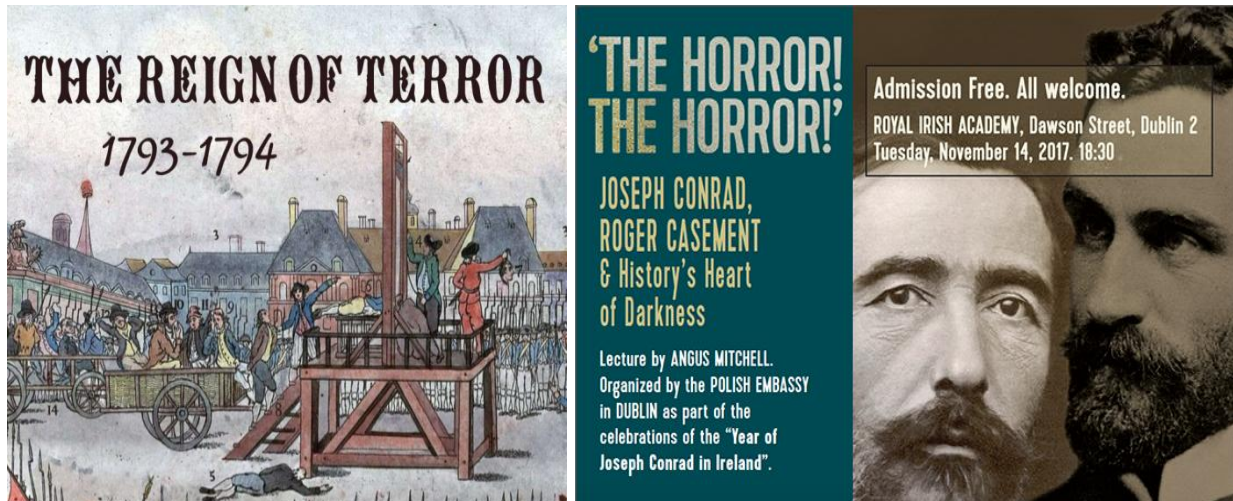
Leaving aside who is responsible for the more grotesque form of “terror” – Hamas or Israel – the standards by which a moral judgement (or moral judgements) can be made and whether moral distinctions are even allowable are dealt with in a little book from ten years ago by Sophie Wahnich entitled [In Defence of the Terror](#). The definite article grounds her analysis in a specific time and place but she offers generalised conclusions. Should historical judgements be timebound or timeless? They must be both, of course, whether applied to events, people, statues, records, finding aids, referenda, etc. etc. Wahnich tries (in my view unsuccessfully) to distinguish between “revolutionary terror” and “terrorism”. Her thesis seems to be that the horror is OK provided it is motivated by intentions and directed towards goals you approve of.

The words “terrorism” and “terrorists” were coined in the wake of the French revolution to describe the “men of blood” who established and exercised the mechanisms of fearsome repression ... “Did you want a revolution without a revolution?” Robespierre sharply remarked. In her provocative essay, Sophie Wahnich has new things to say about the difference between today’s terrorists and their nominal 18th-century predecessors ... Her premise is that dismissive disgust at blood spilt and life lost is an edifying but overly simplistic and apolitical response to revolution past and present ... “The violence exercised on 11 September 2001 aimed neither at equality nor liberty. Nor did the preventive war announced by the president of the United States.”



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According to Wahnich, there is an analogy to be drawn between 1793 and 2001, in the way the French revolutionaries and the Americans responded to "being in fear" by seeking common resistance to the enemy through anger, courage and justice. But ... "the Americans, despite what they say, do not live in a time of foundation, and we have not finished observing the forms of dread that the American response has provoked – the dread of a violence that is not foundational but policing, and recently also preventative." The French revolutionaries, in contrast, did live at a time of foundation ... which, Wahnich argues, could not be secured without heroism in the face of profanation. On her account, the price of the Terror was "a sacred transaction in which the foundation of values required the death of men" ... Being frightened of terror and terrorism and refusing to think carefully and accurately about the topic are not the same thing ...



Some of the reviewers on [Good Reads](#) quote Mark Twain

"There were two 'Reigns of Terror,' if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon ten thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the "horrors" of the minor Terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe, compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heart-break? What is swift death by lightning compared with death by slow fire at the stake? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we have all been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror—that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves." (Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court).

Twain reminds us that abiding horror is to be found in "heartless cold blood [lasting] a thousand years" and not just violently in "hot passion [lasting] mere months". I prefer his sensibility to Wahnich's. It reminds me a little of Conrad: "*The horror! The horror!*" And the horror is all around us – Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, the Rohingya, the Uyghurs .....

**2024, April 9**

**<<AW: Your position seems to be that, someone having created the commemoration, everyone coming after that is bound by the decision.>>**

**<<CH: Not my position at all. I believe interpretation (all interpretation, including statues, and hence all archival description) should be provisional, contested, and nuanced – rejecting the binary in favour of multiplicity. I don't believe in censorship and erasure because it is they that are trying to bind me (and everyone else) to a decision taken by those who think they have the right to the final say (or, as we used to have it, who think they have God on their side).>>**



### Memory in the Cross-Hairs of History

An exhibition in Canberra is (unsurprisingly) under fire from those who support Israel for including in a display about feminism the “controversial feminist” Clementine Ford who has stated recently (inter alia) that Zionists are “*enthusiastic supporters of a murderous regime that has been killing children for over 70 years*”. A museum spokesperson said “*the exhibition had been on display for nearly two years and the museum had not received any formal complaints regarding the content.*”

Would it make any difference if complaints had been made formally? In what way does the museum’s response address the substance of the issue: viz. what makes a memory unacceptable? Does memorialisation involve endorsement and/or approval?

The chair of Jewish rights group the Anti-Defamation Commission, Dvir Abramovich, called on the museum’s director Stephanie Bull and her board to “stand on the right side of history” by removing Ford from the exhibition. “We could not remain silent over a person who ...should not be honoured and celebrated in the Museum of Australian Democracy,” Dr Abramovich told [SkyNews.com.au](http://SkyNews.com.au). “Over the last few years, Ms Clementine Ford has made a series of disturbing and hurtful comments that tear to shreds the values that our society and MoAD uphold. “Ford’s presence at the MoAD provides her with a legitimacy that she does not deserve and is a slap in the face to every Australian who believes in the ideals of fairness, justice, equality and respect for all. “It not only brings dishonour to this esteemed institution and tarnishes its reputation but diminishes other figures featured in the museum. “As anti-Semitism and attacks on the Jewish people spread like wildfire throughout our nation, institutions have a moral duty to make it crystal clear that anyone who fans the flames of intolerance and targets any community must be condemned.”

The theme of the exhibition – “[Changemakers](#)” – is activism, with a focus on feminism.

Australian women were the first in the world to achieve both the right to vote and to stand for election, yet they still faced inequality. This exhibition, proudly supported by the Commonwealth Bank of Australia's Next Chapter program, tells the story of the fight for women's rights in Australia. Discover the remarkable stories of activists like Edna Ryan campaigning for equal pay in 1974 and Nyadol Nyuon's advocacy for refugee women today.

It would be naïve, I think, for the museum to say that its exhibition does not involve a measure of approval. The Christchurch shooter was an activist in his way, but he will not figure in an exhibition about activism but rather in one about infamy.

The focus of the Anti-Defamation Commission’s complaint is not on the subject’s activism as a feminist but on her anti-Israel views which are collateral to that. So, another issue is whether subjects should be judged in the round or condemned for just one aspect of their persona (cf. condemning Woodrow Wilson for his racial views and disregarding the rest of his work and achievements and character – his other failings also for that matter). Should zealots be permitted to cancel memories (e.g. statues) based on the one aspect of someone’s character that happens to be the focus of their zeal? Is God really on their side or on the side of a more balanced reflection? Depends, I suppose, on whether you read the Old Testament or the New. Must criticism of the State of Israel and its treatment of Palestinians (past and present) be seen as tearing to shreds “*the values that our society and MoAD uphold ... a slap in the face to every Australian who believes in the ideals of fairness, justice, equality and respect for all.*” Do Ford’s less temperate descriptions of Zionism (quoted as “*pathetic... basic and gross*”, “*monsters*”, “*sadists*” and “*ghouls*”) invalidate her core proposition?

Is there a difference between remembering dead people and memorialising those who are still alive and active? The current mania for decolonisation reaches back to past sins but the politics of cancelation are invariably current.

Ultimately, what puts a person (alive or dead) beyond the pale of memory? What views or actions are so far outside the scope of toleration that they cannot simply be denounced but





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must be expunged? What obligations does a curator have to “contextualise” memory in the service of current “values”? What is the relationship between Truth and Values? Should curators uphold “values” at all (current or otherwise) or question them? Whose “values”? What to do when the “values” of some are not (despite wishful thinking) the values of all? Who looks out for minority “values” and dissenting “values”?

Memory has a social purpose, no doubt about it. Even old-style libertarians (like myself) can’t duck the claims of society and archivists are necessarily dedicated to the social worth of what we do. We used to think the social value of archives was about upholding Truth by preserving Evidence. We now know that necessarily involves taking positions on the use to which archives are put, specifically in our description and treatment of them but also on nearly every aspect of our work. But is that purpose to endorse and enforce one view of things? This debate is about the foundations on which our commitment to a social purpose rests. Do we even have a purely social purpose or is it also a moral one? Do we recognise the distinction?

Is our work dedicated to archival values (whatever they may be) and not to social values (as they are articulated to us by the State or by self-appointed arbiters of virtue) in the belief that our values contribute on their own terms to social values even when we are accused of affronting them?

Clearly, it is easier to ask these questions than it is to answer them.

What difference, then, does a word make? Critics of Israel are accused of [antisemitism](#):

hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group  
not toward or against a political entity.

Opponents of The Voice were accused (by Albanese amongst others) of [racism](#)

a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race

not a disavowal of the belief that race should be the determinant of constitutional rights.

These terms are now so often mis-applied for the purpose of delegitimising opponents that they are devoid of specific meaning. Hardly an outcome that those most prone to use them would wish for. The whole tenor of this thread has been about memory and perception, but it has also been about understanding and expression. If you concede that it is possible to hate Israel without being antisemitic and to have opposed The Voice without being a racist and that the misuse of words can undermine what we do, then perhaps archivists need to better understand theories of [language and cognition](#) – not just our understanding of the record but also our ways of expressing that understanding. I thought I had left [linguistics](#) behind when I left Teachers’ College and changed career direction, but now I wonder.

**PS.** MoAD claims that “*Australian women were the first in the world to achieve both the right to vote and to stand for election*” not mentioning that “[in 1893] [New Zealand became the first self-governing nation in the world where women had won the right to vote.](#)” Not mis-information, perhaps. Nothing for ACMA to hyperventilate about. But economical, all the same, I think you would agree.

**PPS.** What on earth were the non-self-governing nations where women achieved the right to vote before 1893? *Wikipedia* suggests [an answer](#):

Several instances occurred in recent centuries where women were selectively given, then stripped of, the right to vote. In Sweden, conditional women's suffrage was in effect during the Age of Liberty (1718–1772), as well as in Revolutionary and early-independence New Jersey (1776–1807). The first territory to *continuously* allow women to vote to this present day is the Pitcairn Islands since 1838. The Kingdom of Hawaii, which originally had universal



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suffrage in 1840, rescinded this in 1852 and was subsequently annexed by the United States in 1898. In the years after 1869, a number of provinces held by the British and Russian empires conferred women's suffrage, and some of these became sovereign nations at a later point, like New Zealand, Australia, and Finland. Several states and territories of the United States, such as Wyoming (1869) and Utah (1870), also granted women the right to vote. Women who owned property gained the right to vote in the Isle of Man in 1881, and in 1893, women in the then self-governing British colony of New Zealand were granted the right to vote. In Australia, the colony of South Australia conferred voter rights on all women from 1894, and the right to stand for Parliament from 1895, while the Australian Federal Parliament conferred the right to vote and stand for election in 1902 (although it allowed for the exclusion of "aboriginal natives") ...

So much for triumphalism.

**2024, April 11:**

**<<These terms are now so often mis-applied for the purpose of delegitimising opponents that they are devoid of specific meaning>>**

Another word devalued by weaponisation in the service of zeal is [terrorism](#):

*There is no consensus, scholarly or legal, on the definition of terrorism.*

[UNRWA](#) (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East) is an aid agency in the news which we are being invited to demonise or admire. Israel condemns it as a "terrorist" front and [impedes](#) its operations. Australia (along with some other countries) has just [restored funding](#). UNRWA has become a lightning rod for the proposition that antisemitism adopts [new masks](#): antiZionism = antiIsrael = antiSemitism

*... antisemitism "evolves with time and context ... adopts new masks, learning how to hide and the different forms sometimes finding shelter behind freedom of expression" ... philosopher Vladimir Yankelevich ... in 1968 – after the Six-Day War – became one of the earliest identifiers of anti-Zionism as a lethally effective surrogate for antisemitism that cast Jews as perpetrators rather than as victims of evil.*

Surrogacy is a good term for the process by which memory is distorted by those with an agenda – forcing memory workers into a corner. The concept of [distortion](#) is itself problematic for postmodernists who hold that everyone has an agenda. But when everyone has an agenda, no one has an agenda, and the idea that there is an agenda becomes meaningless. The terms *antisemitism*, *racism*, and *terrorism* are all used to frame people's views and actions with derogatory connotations.

### The Perils of Innocency and the Avoidance of Blame

Museums, libraries, archives, et al run the risk of inflaming rather than informing when they tread (consciously or unconsciously) onto these minefields. MoAD could be forgiven for not realising that celebrating a feminist would expose them to charges of antisemitism. Cultural institutions are timid beasts, wanting to conform to agreed values and to be admired for doing so (or maybe just fearful of their funding). The natural mainstream response to these dangers is to avoid them altogether (provided they can figure out who is likely to object to what). This encourages the [heckler's veto](#):

*a situation in which a party who disagrees with a speaker's message is able to unilaterally trigger events that result in the speaker being silenced. For example, a [heckler](#) can disrupt a speech to the point that the speech is canceled.*

On any subject even remotely approaching controversy, memory institutions face this quandary. So far as I can tell, there is no settled professional view on how to handle it.



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

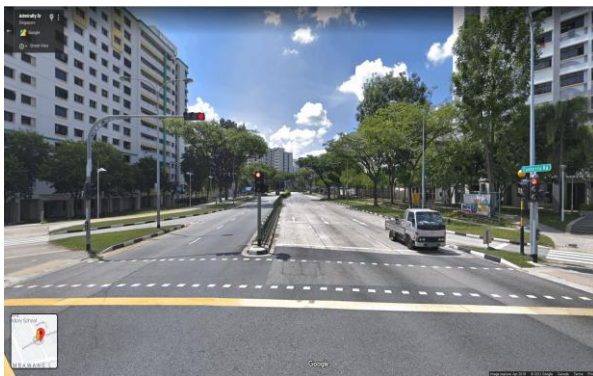
### The Virtues of Resolution and Advocacy

At the other extreme, memory institutions become self-consciously and unashamedly instruments of the message, e.g.

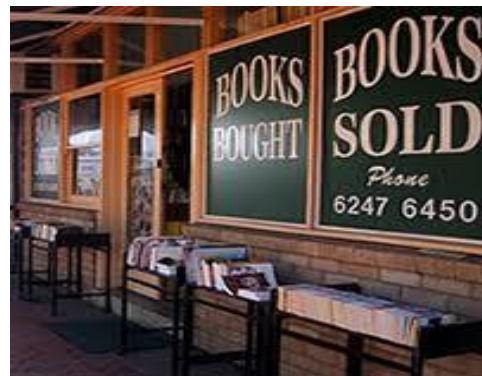
- The Jewish Museum of London won the [Museums Change Lives Award 2019](#) for Jews, Money, Myth, an exhibition exploring the complex relationship between Jews and money over 2,000 years – confronting deeply held stereotypes that have persisted over centuries.
- Camp resident Muhammad al-Khatib founded the [Memories Museum](#) in 2005 by collecting old family heirlooms from Palestinians in camps across Lebanon and Syria. He was six months old in 1948, when his own family fled Palestine for Lebanon “with only the clothes on our backs” and a few house keys, he tells *L'Orient Today*. “This is a type of heritage,” Khatib says of the mostly everyday objects in his museum. “They are a form of proof that we existed on that land.”

### 2024, April 15:

I’m surprised how often my non-fiction purchases, selected purely for interest in the subject matter, contain nuggets pertinent to things literary or archival. And so (as Pepys might say) to Canberra this last weekend. Are they the world’s worst drivers, or what? Well, maybe the Irish. There’s more control down there for less traffic than any other place I know. Perhaps that explains it. I picked up three second-hand books from [Book Lore](#) in Lyneham.



**Canberra Rush-Hour**



**Book Lore**

Catherine Nixey [The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World](#) (2018)

A cracking good book; read it if you can. Tells how, in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, Christians went (in less than 80 years) from being the persecuted to being the persecutors; how Greco-Roman art, literature, and monuments (to say nothing of people) were exterminated by religious thugs (urged on by sainted clerics we now revere). A few years ago, we lamented the destruction of Palmyra’s remains by ISIS fanatics, forgetting that the original destruction (leaving behind the traces that ISIS finished off) was carried out by equally fanatic Christians in AD 382. Literary erasure was less brutal but just as effective:

*At a time in which parchment was scarce, many ancient writers were simply erased, scrubbed away so that their pages could be reused for more elevated themes. Palimpsests ... provide glimpses of the moments at which these ancient works vanished. A last copy of Cicero’s De re publica was written over by Augustine on the Psalms. A biographical work by Seneca disappeared beneath yet another Old Testament. A codex of Sallust’s histories was scrubbed away to make room for more St Jerome. Other ancient texts were lost through ignorance. Despised and ignored, over the years, they simply crumbled into dust, food for bookworms but not for thought. The work of Democritus, one of the greatest Greek philosophers and the father of atomic theory, was entirely lost. Only one percent of Latin literature survived the centuries ... One can achieve a great deal by the blunt*





## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

*weapons of indifference and sheer stupidity.* p. xxxii. [Have to wonder a bit about that metric. How can we know?]

*We see the same stars, the sky is shared by all, the same world surrounds us. What does it matter what wisdom a person uses to seek for the truth? **Symmachus** That all superstition of pagans and heathens should be annihilated is what God wants, God commands, God proclaims! **St Augustine.***

She debunks the Christian persecution myth:

*There were simply not that many years of imperially ordered persecution in the Roman Empire. Fewer than thirteen ... The idea ... of a line of satanically inspired emperors, panting for the blood of the faithful is another Christian myth. As the modern historian Keith Hopkins wrote, 'the traditional question: "Why were the Christians persecuted?" with all its implications of unjust repression and eventual triumph, should be re-phrased: "Why were the Christians persecuted so little and so late?"'*

[I think she's talking about formal, empire-wide persecutions. Local persecutions outside those parameters may have been beneath the notice of authorities in Rome.]



Armand Marie Leroi [\*The Lagoon: How Aristotle Invented Science\*](#) (2014)

Because I have such an admiration for Aristotle's way of thinking, this purchase was a no-brainer.

*There is a bookshop in old Athens. It is the loveliest I know. It lies in an alley near the Agora, next to a shop that sells canaries and quails from cages hung on the façade ... in the gloom, there are crates of lithographs and topographical maps. Terracotta tiles and plaster busts of ancient philosophers and playwrights do duty as bookends ... I have returned so often, and the scene is so constant, that it is hard to remember when, exactly, I first walked into George Papadatos' bookshop. But I do recall it was the drachma's last Spring ... George - lank dark hair, a bookman's paunch - sat at his desk reading an old French political tract ... Scanning his shelves, I saw Andrew Lang's *Odyssey* and three volumes of Jowett's *Plato*. They were the sort of books that might have belonged to an Englishman, a schoolmaster perhaps, who had retired to Athens, lived on his pension, and died there with some epigram of Callimachus on his lips. Whoever he was, he also left, in a row of Clarendon blue, the complete *Works of Aristotle Translated into English* edited by J. S. Smith and W. D. Ross and published between 1910 and 1952 ... the title in the fourth volume in the series had caught my eye: *Historia animalium*. I opened it and read about shells ... p.3*

*In 345 BC Aristotle, young and newly married, arrived on the island. In Athens, he had been taught by Plato to seek truth in the intangible realm of ideas. But rejecting his teacher's metaphysics, Aristotle turned to the natural world ... he catalogued the animals in his world. he observed them, dissected them, and recorded how they lived, fed and bred ... And then he explained it all. The Lagoon is the story of how Aristotle founded science, how for centuries his work was celebrated and how, in the Scientific Revolution, it was condemned ... modern science still bears the stamp of its founder. Even now, Aristotle teaches us how to discover new worlds. [From the dust jacket.]*



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

Thomas Burns [A History of the Ostrogoths](#) (1984)

*Theology, specifically the Arian denial of the Trinity, mattered little to most Goths ... Theodoric and the nobility essentially viewed religion as part of politics. Theodoric's vaunted statement to the Jews that "we cannot impose religion, and no one can be made to believe in spite of himself" extended toleration in exchange for political loyalty ... After the war, most Goths ... quietly intermarried and, in general, lived within the social and legal structures of reconquered Italy ... Goths even served as priests, deacons, scribes, and lesser clerks in the sixth-century Orthodox church. The Documentum Neapolitanum lists [many Gothic names]. The Gothic names Angelfrid, Alamoda, and Gudilebus appear in the Documentum Aretinum. Offices such a spodei occur only in these documents and may represent a brief incorporation of Gothic (i.e. Arian) nomenclature during the period immediately after the dissolution of the Ostrogothic Kingdom. pp.158-160*

On Sunday, I dropped by [The Paperchain](#) in Manuka, where I usually pick up a few remainders. This time, I walked away \$138 poorer. One title appealed in light of some previous posts on this thread: Peter Hughes [A History of Love and Hate in 21 Statues](#) (2121):



Hatshepsut (*Thebes, Egypt*), Nero (*Colchester, UK*), Athena (*Palmyra, Syria*), Buddhas of Bamiyan (*Afghanistan*), Hecate (*Constantinople*), Our Lady of Caversham (*Caversham, UK*), Huitzilopochtli (*Mexico*), Confucius (*China*), Louis XV (*Paris, France*), Felix Mendelssohn (*Leipzig, Germany*), Confederate Monument (*Virginia, USA*), Sir John Macdonald (*Montreal, Canada*), Edward Colston (*Bristol, UK*), Christopher Columbus (*Caracas, Venezuela*), Cecil Rhodes (*Cape Town, South Africa*), George Washington (*Portland, USA*), Joseph Stalin (*Budapest, Hungary*), Yagan (*Perth, Australia*), Saddam Hussein (*Baghdad, Iraq*), B R Ambedkar (*India*), Frederick Douglass (*New York, USA*).

Each and every one of them has been destroyed by the forces of hate and intolerance. Hughes concludes with a moving Epilogue paying tribute to Khaled Al-Asaad, the brave archaeologist killed by ISIS for trying to save the remnants from Palmyra.







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Statue-topplers among us will be warmed by some of the negative comments about this book on *Good Reads*.

**2024, April 20:**

**<<Each and every one of them has been destroyed  
by the forces of hate and intolerance.>>**

And also of ignorance.

Another purchase last weekend contains a reflection on the destruction, in the wave of statue toppling following the killing of George Floyd, of a [statue of Ulysses S Grant](#) in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park in June 2020 - along with defilement of other statues (including those of Francis Scott Key and [Cervantes](#)).

How did Grant, the hero of the Union Army and the champion of Reconstruction, end up on the ground? How had the Civil War narrative grown so twisted that Grant ... would become the enemy of emancipation? The protesters were in no mood to consider Grant's virtues ... In their view, he was tarnished by a brief association with slavery long before the war ... Grant's father-in-law gave him a slave as a gift when he was struggling to make it as a farmer. Grant was uncomfortable owning a slave, and he freed him soon after. That's pretty much all there is to know about Grant as a slave-holder ... I knew the history. I thought I was beginning to understand Grant, with all of his complexities. I had come to feel great admiration for his physical courage, his emotional intelligence, and his selfless patriotism ... It offended me to think that protesters would rewrite civil rights history to condemn him ... He went down in history as a hero, and yet his legacy has been plagued by his flaws ... Ranked second from the bottom of US presidents by historians in 1948, Grant had risen to twenty-first by 2018 ... Bret Baier [To Rescue the Republic: Ulysses S Grant, The Fragile Union, and the Crisis of 1876](#) (2021)

At first blush, one is inclined to couple BLM wreckers with the fanatical Christians of the fourth century and the equally fanatical ISIS of our own. It's not simply that they represent a contending view, an alternative view, but that they are bone-jarringly wrong in their interpretations and sensibilities. These destructions are not just instances of mindless vandalism (like teenage hoonos in stolen cars); they are purposed by an ideological understanding of issues (however wrong-headed). Why can't we just turn away from such ignorance and get on with our own concerns? Because it is what the theologians call [invincible ignorance](#)

... to make assertions with no consideration of objections or to simply dismiss objections by calling them excuses, conjecture, anecdotal, etc. or saying that they are proof of nothing, all without actually demonstrating how the objection fit these terms. It is similar to the [ad lapidem fallacy](#), in which the person rejects all the evidence and logic presented, without providing any evidence or logic that could lead to a different conclusion.

and because it characterises some uses to which historical evidence is being put, in the service of social justice and "community" history. Historical evidence becomes "proof of nothing", it merely triggers assertions of prejudice. That makes it our concern.

The only rational explanation I have heard treats historical understanding as a kind of [restorative justice](#) – concerned less with truth/untruth and more with repairing perceived wrongs through re-evaluation of the past. The starting point for such a view has to be [destabilising](#) understanding and upholding a sense of [grievance](#). Not all instincts for social justice and not all focus on community history are thus flawed, of course. Many of them are very commendable. But the same underlying purpose is now inter-woven as one strand in the many uses to which historical evidence is put. Perhaps it isn't so very different from old-fashioned prejudice which hasn't (or shouldn't have) outlawed any honest use of archives - or dishonest ones for that matter.





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A straight-forward scepticism about the intentions of users should be part of our professional armoury but some of us seem to feel a need to aid and abet. However, I long ago put aside any feeling that it was part of my job to discriminate for or against. I reached that conclusion when I decided I couldn't any longer subscribe to the granting of access governed by the concept of *bona fide research*. No one could ever satisfactorily explain to me what that phrase meant. They wanted to make it the basis for "special access" – s.56(2) – in drafting the [Archives Act](#), but it wouldn't wash.

<<I couldn't any longer subscribe to the granting of access governed by the concept of *bona fide research*.>>

Someone once told me that "bona fide research" was used by SLNSW to keep out tramps and people looking for a winning system on the ponies from the newspaper reading room.

**2024, April 23:**

<<The starting point for such a view has to be destabilising understanding and upholding a sense of grievance. Not all instincts for social justice and not all focus on community history are thus flawed, of course. Many of them are very commendable. But the same underlying purpose is now inter-woven as one strand in the many uses to which historical evidence is put.>>

Does this unfairly taint social justice and community history with the brush of cancellation extremism? No more, I would say, than hatred of Israel is tainted with the brush of antisemitism or opposition to The Voice was tainted with the brush of racism. The issues (for me) are twofold.

1. Where to draw the line between strong opinions, legitimately at variance with each other, and extremism? This is an issue for everybody.
2. How to recalibrate, in the service of our social obligations, the archivist's formerly held ideal of impartiality. That one is ours to deal with.

Being socially responsible comes with a cost. Impartiality was akin to indifference but it upheld something that was (and still is) important. So, perhaps the question, after all, is not **whether** the archivist should (or should not) be committed to a view of historical knowledge but rather **which** view of historical knowledge he should be committed to.

[[Acton's](#)] claim that moral judgment on past crimes and misdeeds is one of the supreme duties of the historian was at odds with the entire trend of historiography in his time and set him apart by its rigor from all the noted historians and thinkers about history of his own generation and thereafter. His tortured adherence to this conviction in full awareness of the isolation it brought upon him gives to his life, together with his failure to realize his aim of a history of liberty, a genuinely tragic character.

« « « « «

As the offspring of a great humanistic tradition ... historiography has never been, and cannot be, indifferent to moral considerations. Unlike Acton, though, historians know that they possess neither the power nor authority to speak as the voice of History and pronounce its verdict for all time.

**2024, May 1:**

<<I couldn't any longer subscribe to the granting of access governed by the concept of *bona fide research*.>>

Just browsing, I have come across this [definition](#)

A bona fide researcher is defined as being a person with professional expertise to conduct bona fide research ...

Priceless.

A somewhat [more intelligible definition](#) (but very restrictive) is from my old alma mater



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We will accept applications from bona fide researchers who:

- i) conduct *bona fide* research. This involves high quality, ethical projects for research purposes using rigorous scientific methods. There must be an intention to publish the research findings for wider scientific and eventual public benefit, without restrictions and with minimal delay.
- ii) have a formal relationship with a *bona fide* research organisation, which is an established academic institution, research body or organisation with the capability to lead or participate in high quality, ethical research. It is not a requirement that research is the primary business of that organisation, or that the organisation is publicly financed. In this context, a public-private partnership may qualify as a *bona fide* research organisation.

It's interesting that old-fashioned ideas about restricting access (by giving consideration to the purposes for which access is sought), abandoned for archival access and FOI, are re-asserting themselves in the world of data "privacy".

**<<old-fashioned ideas about restricting access (by giving consideration to the purposes for which access is sought), abandoned for archival access and FOI, are re-asserting themselves in the world of data "privacy".>>**

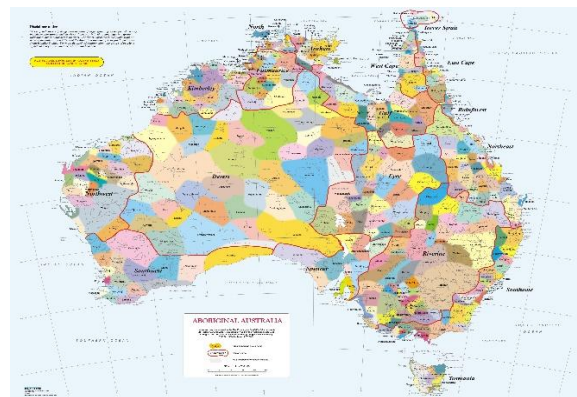
Come to think of it, that might be a line of research for someone trying to differentiate access regimes from privacy regimes: the former focussing on what you get access to and the latter on why you get access to it.

**2024, June 1:**

**<<26 Jan., 2023: If you exclude the fully or partly integrated (those employed in or running businesses, working 9 to 5, living in towns and cities, elected representatives, professionals and tradesmen, actors, musicians, and writers, service personnel, advisors, and all the activists) you are left with those still enduring the legacy of reserves and missions in camps and on the outskirts of rural townships and (more hopefully) in homelands and outstations and that is where the horror is to be found and must be dealt with. And if that distinction is not being made in the data, then the metrics are even worse than they appear. But we are often invited to think in stereotypes (especially by some politicians, activists, shock-jocks, and commentators who have few qualms about speaking for indigenous people as a category) - the notion that indigenous Australians are all one undifferentiated group, who think alike, and to whom the same generalities, norms, nostrums, and platitudes can be applied, shrugging off this lazy approach with modifiers such as "some" or "typically". The ludicrous idea that the health issues facing my Aboriginal neighbour in suburban Narara are the same as in the townships. So like a crusade. So insulting!>>**



**New-Comers**



**Old-Timers**

With The Voice proposals thankfully in the past, it may be time to let this go. But if Laura Tingle won't, why should I? The proposition that there should be one constitutionally enshrined Voice for the Indigenous (based on race) was always flawed by heterogeneity:



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... the map produced by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in 1996 shows the land divided up into hundreds of First Nations ... some areas of the continent – generally those of desert or mountain – are divided into relatively few pieces ... the east and the north coasts, by contrast, are divided into dozens upon dozens of roughly county-sized chunks. Sydney straddles the boundary between the Eora and the Kuning-gai peoples; Melbourne, the Woiworung and Boonworrung. Even little Tasmania ... contains no fewer than eight different peoples ... John Elledge *A History of the World in 47 Borders* (2024), p.243.

The Voice proposition established one voice, but there are hundreds. Moreover, the divide is now societal, not just ethnic. The idea that one Voice could speak for the layers of the Indigenous – the integrated (not assimilated), the urban, and those living in townships and settlements – was ludicrous from the outset. It was a political device developed by activists to acquire leverage, and we know the elements within the Indigenous community for which it would have spoken.

Be that as it may. Descriptively, topography is an important dimension. We have always had to taxonomize. Is there such a word? Yes [there is](#) according to some. We speak of European and Indigenous. In view of our increasingly diverse ethnic makeup, it might be more accurate to refer to New-Comers and Old-Timers. The taxonomy of New-Comers' place names is complicated enough, without even pausing to consider non-English speakers amongst the New-Comers. Just think of the States and Territories, ignoring for a moment contractions, such as NSW, and colloquialisms, such as Straya, and the fact that boundaries shift from time to time (and may do so again) and that in some cases one entity was included, for a time, within another; here are some variants:

[Australia](#): Terra Australis; Great South Land; New Holland

[New South Wales](#): New Wales (briefly); Botany Bay

[Victoria](#): Sullivan Bay Settlement; Port Phillip District

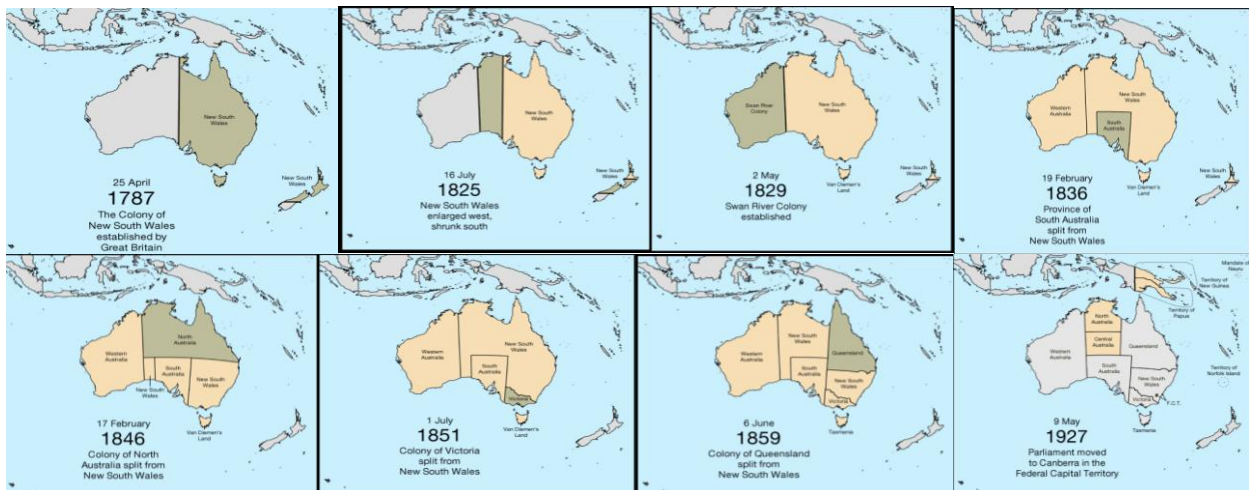
[Tasmania](#): Anthony Van Diemen's Land; Van Diemen's Land

[South Australia](#): Nuyt's Land

[Queensland](#): Moreton Bay Penal Settlement

[Western Australia](#): Swan River Colony

[Northern Territory](#): North Australia



I imagine many of our archives nowadays incorporate Old-Timers' place names (somewhat aligned to the more expansive idea of "[Country](#)" bereft of its poetical connotations) alongside those of the New-Comers, although, as I understand it, the concept of "place name" may itself be problematic in this context. If ever there was an argument for a DAD to sort out at least this part of the landscape, surely this is it.





## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

**PS** One problem with [historical place names](#) is whether or not to treat them as timeless or time-bound, viz. whether the term “Van Diemen’s Land” is limited to the period in which that term was commonly (or officially) used or timelessly standing as a variant for Tasmania:

- Van Diemen’s Land (1642-1856); Tasmania (1856-ct) **or**
- Van Diemen’s Land *see also* Tasmania **or**
- Tasmania *use for* Van Diemen’s Land

**PPS** Many of the Old-Timer terms used in this post are marked by Word as errors. When I was in NZ, we had to look for software that wouldn’t reject Maori terms.

**PPPS** The question of boundaries is important in topography. Elledge has several examples including the curious case of [Bir Tawil](#) which has been orphaned in a dispute between Egypt and Sudan over somewhere else.

**2024, June 18:**

**<<April 20, 2024: ... a reflection on the destruction, in the wave of statue toppling following the killing of George Floyd, of a [statue of Ulysses S Grant](#) in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park in June 2020 - along with defilement of other statues (including those of Francis Scott Key and [Cervantes](#)).>>**

**<<April 23, 2024: [[Acton’s](#)] claim that moral judgment on past crimes and misdeeds is one of the supreme duties of the historian was at odds with the entire trend of historiography in his time ... historiography has never been, and cannot be, indifferent to moral considerations. Unlike Acton, though, historians know that they possess neither the power nor authority to speak as the voice of History and pronounce its verdict for all time. >>**

Thus [Chesterton](#), critiquing [A Child’s History of England](#) by Charles Dickens:

The fault of Dickens is not (as is often said) that “he applies the same moral standard to all ages.” Every sane man must do that: a moral standard must remain the same or it is not a moral standard ... The fault of the Dickens school of popular history lies, not in the application of a plain rule of right and wrong to all circumstances, but in ignorance of the circumstances to which it was applied ... The business of a good man in Dickens’s time was to bring justice up to date. The business of a good man in Dunstan’s time was to toil to ensure the survival of any justice at all.

And Dickens, through being a living and fighting man of his own time, kept the health of his own heart, and so saw many truths with a single eye; truths that were spoilt for subtler eyes. He was much more really right than Carlyle; immeasurably more right than Froude ... precisely because he applied plain human morals to all the facts as he saw them. Carlyle really had a vague idea that in coarse and cruel times it was right to be coarse and cruel; that tyranny was excusable in the twelfth century : as if the twelfth century did not denounce tyrants as much or more than any other ... sheer instinct and good moral tradition made him right ... about Henry VIII.; right where Froude is wildly wrong ... Dickens in his childish but robust way does perceive the main point about him ; that he was a wicked man. He misses all the fine shades, of course ... But he sees the solid bulk of definite badness simply because it was there; and Froude cannot see it at all; because Froude followed Carlyle and played tricks with the eternal conscience. Henry VIII. *was* “a blot of blood and grease upon the history of England.” ...

Good stuff, this.

**2024, June 21:**

**<<13 June, 2020 AW: Statues, and other commemoration sites, are invariably erected later than the event they commemorate. At best they are historical evidence that a group in society considered the event worthy of commemoration. They are a symbol for the values and beliefs of that group. As a symbol to one group it is inevitable that they are an anti-symbol to other groups that do not share those values**



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

and beliefs. The iconography, for example, of the Captain Cook statues has been well covered in The Conversation.>>

### Beeldenstorm



...outbreaks of destruction of religious images that occurred in Europe in the 16th century, known in English as the **Great Iconoclasm** or **Iconoclastic Fury** and in French as the **Furie iconoclaste**.

The Brabant town of Mechelen is overshadowed by the flanking monsters of Brussels and Antwerp ... The Church of St John is where a *lot* of Catholic devotional art has ended up ... it is also the home of one of the most astounding paintings by Rubens, himself one of art's greatest wonder-workers. It shows a crowded, magical version of the Three Magi venerating a glowing baby Jesus, seemingly the picture's light source ... Beyond them are a brilliantly observed gang of bystanders ... The painting's side panels can be ingeniously flipped two ways ...

I specifically mention these fantastic pictures partly as my fervent evangelical duty to urge anyone in the Mechelen area to go and see them, but also to make a wider, fairly obvious point about the entire conflict [Revolt of the Netherlands] from its origins in the 1550s to the final agreement to partition the Netherlands in the 1640s. These extreme, passionate, strange paintings were commissioned from Rubens in 1614 as just one small element in the vast work of rebuilding ...

For English-speaking readers all sympathy tends to be ... with the rebels ... The problem though has always been that many inhabitants of the Seventeen Provinces were *not* rebels and it always remained plausible and intellectually decent to stay Catholic ... In the end the great sorting machine of the wars drove Protestants north and Catholics south, but from a Catholic point of view the fighting *saved* ten of the seventeen ...

The Black Legend of Spain has ... shaped our understanding of the wars ... the very existence of Rubens and the other great Catholic painters of the period in the south who repaired the amazing damage done to the patrimony of the Netherlands has always had an unacceptable, sinister air, certainly to Dutch Calvinists who rejected the very idea of such religious images ...

The war between Spain and the rebels was carried out through the power of images, and countless paintings and pamphlets now in museums were part of a hysteria-laden propaganda drive by one side or the other ... the Beeldenstorm ('statue storm') [was] one of the great cultural catastrophes in Europe's history, where mobs in each province made bonfires of the whole medieval artistic tradition ... This had been a factor in Protestant victories across Europe for a generation, from the expunging of images in Zurich to the extraordinary purging of Scotland, which was so effective that almost no traces remain of its Catholic art ...

... a loathing for Spain ... became fanatical, with volunteers and mercenaries from Scotland, England and the German Protestant states coming to fight. Less well known was that, of course, this also became the great Catholic cause – with equally fervent and articulate fighters from Spain, France and Italy ... backed up by the intellectual firepower of the Jesuits



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... as Rome realized that Calvin and the others had created a morose, masculine, visually un compelling (whitewash) and generally un fun creed. Rubens became the premier exponent of this cult of glamour and emotion, wounds and sacrifice ...

Throughout the fight to suppress the rebellious provinces, the Catholic world poured in money, resources and men ... Each siege or battle was part of a cosmic conflict – imagined by Rubens in several huge canvasses ... - which also became confused with the predominantly Catholic battle in Central Europe and the Mediterranean ... and, in a wider world, with the battle to extirpate every manner of paganism, from America to Asia.

Needless to say, the Protestants disagreed.

Simon Winder, *Lotharingia: A Personal History of Europe's Lost Country* (2019), pp.192-196.

This is a book that either [delights or enrages](#) its readers.

### 2024, June 25:

<<27 February, 2021: ... We proclaim ourselves to be (inter alia) on the side of truth and open-ness. How if people like Sue McKerracher and David Fricker said that governments, in the service of democracy, should be less secretive and more truthful with people? How if they had supported the idea that the interests of the nation are advanced when folk can reach "evidence-based judgements on the world in which they live"? They couldn't say that to the people who employ them, of course. And there are nuanced arguments for upholding security. But there's nothing nuanced about avoiding the issue altogether on such a subject as that ...>>

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been [freed from prison](#) in the United Kingdom and is travelling home to Australia after he pleads guilty to a single charge of breaching the espionage law in the United States ... Assange rose to prominence with the launch of Wikileaks in 2006, creating an online whistleblower platform for people to submit classified material such as documents and videos anonymously ... Wikileaks published material about many countries, but it was the US, during the administration of former US President Donald Trump, that decided to [charge him in 2019](#) with 17 counts of breaching the Espionage Act ...

"WikiLeaks published groundbreaking stories of government corruption and human rights abuses, holding the powerful accountable for their actions," Wikileaks said in its statement announcing the plea deal. "As editor-in-chief, Julian paid severely for these principles, and for the people's right to know. As he returns to Australia, we thank all who stood by us, fought for us, and remained utterly committed in the fight for his freedom." ...

### A Death Sentence for Democracy?

... the world's self-appointed greatest democracy has long made it clear that basic rights and freedoms are things that only its enemies must abide by. The shameless double standard enables the US to do stuff like make a ruckus over Cuba's political prisoners while simultaneously operating an [illegal US prison](#) on occupied Cuban territory – or call out China for an alleged "[spy balloon](#)" while simultaneously spying on China and everyone else on the planet ...

### 2024, October 22:

And when [the word](#) is Aotearoa -

New Zealand's prime minister has defended the removal of the Māori language from an official invitation sent to an Australian government minister by saying "in my dealings with Australians it always pays to be incredibly simple" ... The New Zealand National party leader Christopher Luxon's comment, during question time in parliament, came in response to questioning from the Labour opposition leader, Chris Hipkins, about the government's use of the Māori language, known as te reo Māori ... The invitation was bound for Tony Burke, Australia's minister for multicultural affairs. The Māori words included the greeting "tena koe" (meaning hello), the sign-off "nāku noa, nā" (which became 'yours sincerely'), and the removal of the widely accepted Māori name for New Zealand: Aotearoa ...





## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

But Luxon didn't take into account the power of Split Enz educating a 13-year-old Burke in Strathfield, Sydney. "I learnt the word [Aotearoa] in 1982 thanks to Split Enz including a reference in the lyrics, Six Months in a Leaky Boat," Burke said on Thursday ... Te reo is an official language of New Zealand, along with sign language, and is increasingly spoken by Māori after decades of decline - in part due to hostile government policies ... The government has issued edicts to public servants to stop communicating in te reo, and asked government departments to rebadge with English names, scrapping or de-prioritising the Māori names given more prominence during Jacinda Ardern's government ...

[Luxton's] quip recalled the former NZ leader Robert Muldoon's infamous line that New Zealanders leaving for Australia "raised the IQ of both countries" ... Asked about Luxon's sledge, the Australian prime minister, Anthony Albanese, said ... "I often think that while we both speak English, sometimes we need interpreters," ... In December [Luxton] told public servants that wished to learn te reo they should pay for it themselves - though it was later revealed he had charged taxpayers more than NZ\$3,000 for his own private tuition.

I'm in Christchurch at the moment so a google-search on "news" brings up this sort of stuff. The NZ debate is raising [parallels](#) with the Welsh and the Gaels. In Australia, similar issues arise in relation to [Indigenous language](#). Historical examples of [linguistic discrimination](#) abound, of course, and in our own time these have morphed into attempts to control and/or suppress [culturally offensive](#) (or insensitive) language. Not just your good old profanity, indecency, and obscenity; ah! those were the days.

**PS.** I hadn't actually considered "agnostic" to be offensive. Just shows how insensitive I can be. Glad I'm not writing finding aids any more.

**2024, November 11:**

**<<26 Feb., 2021: The State cannot stymie the evil of misinformation and it cannot establish a Ministry of Truth. Information warfare can only be won by boots on the ground in the culture wars. People, not Policy. Culture cannot be planned "because it is also the unconscious background of all planning" (T S Eliot). But I agree that the State can help People to get on their feet ("to read and interpret") - without having control over where that will lead. A bureaucrat's nightmare ... >>**

### **Independent senators threaten to vote down misinformation bill**

Keeping my fingers crossed that this dreadful legislation doesn't get up.

**PS.** I hope I'm being clear enough about how I feel about this wretched Bill. Someone told me my October posting about the new NZ Govt's push-back against use of *te reo Māori* didn't make clear where I stood on the issue. I said I posted it because I thought it was funny. But in case I wasn't clear enough: I also think it's pretty shabby.

**2024, November 20:**

**<<Someone told me my October posting about the new NZ Govt's push-back against use of *te reo Māori* didn't make clear where I stood on the issue. I said I posted it because I thought it was funny. But in case I wasn't clear enough: I also think it's pretty shabby.>>**

### **Not so funny**

... On November 14, the controversial Treaty Principles Bill was introduced in [NZ] Parliament for a preliminary vote ... While the treaty was presented as a measure to resolve differences between the Maori and the British, the English and te reo versions of the treaty actually feature some stark differences. The te reo Maori version guarantees "rangatiratanga" to the Maori chiefs. This translates to "self-determination" and guarantees the Maori people the right to govern themselves. However, the English translation says that the Maori chiefs "cede to Her Majesty the Queen of England absolutely and without reservation all the rights and powers of Sovereignty", making no mention of self-rule for the Maori ...

Kassie Hartendorp, a Maori community organiser and director at community campaigning organisation ActionStation Aotearoa ... explained that the te reo version



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includes the term “kawanatanga”, which in historical and linguistic context “gives British settlers the opportunity to set up their own government structure to govern their own people but they would not limit the sovereignty of Indigenous people” ... Both versions of the treaty have been repeatedly breached ... In 1975, the Waitangi Tribunal was established as a permanent body to adjudicate treaty matters ... Over time, billions of dollars have been negotiated in settlements over breaches of the treaty, particularly relating to the widespread seizure of Maori land ...

The Treaty Principles Bill was introduced by Member of Parliament David Seymour of the libertarian ACT Party ... The bill seeks to set specific definitions of the treaty’s principles, which are currently flexible and open to interpretation ... Many, including the Waitangi Tribunal, say this will lead to the erosion of Maori rights ... The bill is strongly opposed by political parties in New Zealand on both the left and the right ...

Implications for treaty-making in this country? Whatever else, it seems to be that reconciliation depends on prevailing public sentiment, not just words in a document. And the diplomatics of this story are fascinating.

One could argue that in NZ the framework provided by the Treaty settlement process (now 50 years in the making) has advanced reconciliation there. As the article suggests, it is widely accepted in that country. Although, in my time there, I heard some subdued muttering about “excesses” and ridicule of ceremonial tokenism. But saying things like that was simply not done in polite circles. And at the political level they seem (wisely) committed to upholding the status quo (if only for want of something better).

But the status quo here is, for the moment, No Treaty/No Voice and one could argue that establishing such a framework now alongside [Closing the Gap](#) and recognition of [Native Title](#) will complicate (at best) or jeopardise (at worst) the anodyne consensus that seems to approve the accomplishments of those initiatives. It was noticeable that during the Referendum references to Closing the Gap and Native Title were mostly either muted or derogatory.

**PS.** Anodyne consensus does not, of course, imply that anyone doubts that more has to be done - as Closing the Gap reports consistently state. It simply means that benign public acquiescence for the effort is no bad basis for further progress.

**2024, November 24:**

**<<Independent senators threaten to vote down misinformation bill:  
Keeping my fingers crossed that this dreadful legislation doesn’t get up.>>**

Communications Minister Michelle Rowland has confirmed the government will pull a controversial Bill attempting to combat misinformation and disinformation after the Opposition and the Greens vowed to oppose it ... The proposed legislation was also opposed by a wide-ranging group of community groups, free speech organisations and religious groups over concerns it would harm free speech, with stakeholders questioning how the definition of truth would be enforced.

**2024, November 25:**

**<<The proposed legislation was also opposed by a wide-ranging  
group of community groups, free speech organisations  
and religious groups over concerns it would harm free speech,  
with stakeholders questioning how the definition of truth would be enforced.>>**

... [three blind men](#) [come] across an elephant ... they had never come across an elephant prior to that moment ... Each blind man felt a different part of the elephant’s body; and each could only feel one part ... They then described the elephant based on their partial experiences, and to no shock, each of their descriptions was the complete opposite of what the other had experienced ... Their differing opinions as to what the elephant was, did not disqualify any of



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them as being wrong; it only meant that each had been exposed to a different version of the truth ...

Lies are untrue. Or, are they simply opinions that differ from one's own? The important issue here is the distinction between knowing the truth and enforcing it.

### Truth

**1a(1)** : the body of real things, events, and facts : [actuality](#)

**(2)** : the state of being the case : [fact](#)

**(3) often capitalized** : a transcendent fundamental or spiritual reality

**1b** : a judgment, proposition, or idea that is true or accepted as true ...

Reality (actuality), facts, transcendence, accepted as true. Is any of that very helpful beyond endorsing the proposition that some things are untrue and that "[Truth](#)" may be untrue in many different ways. It may be partial, biased, mistaken but those who say that "truth lies in the eye of the beholder" are dead wrong. If that phrase means anything, it is that nothing is true. But the [Rape of Nanking](#) (for example) is/was true even though understanding of it differs and is disputed.

What is important, what this failed legislation assailed, is the struggle to find Truth, not a belief that it can be imposed. How thick are/were the bill's proponents if they supposed that having established a mechanism to impose truths they agreed with, that same mechanism would not one day be used to impose truths they reviled?

If you browse through the manifold archives mission statements, you will find they are mostly mechanical – they say what archivists do, not why they do it. They don't say we are knowledge-workers seeking (or helping others to seek) Truth. I failed to find anything inspiring, or even instructive, in that line. Amongst the injunctions given by [ICA](#) is this gem:

- **To facilitate the interpretation of records, archives and data by raising their profile** and by encouraging their greater use within the established legal frameworks.

If you read that literally, we should do nothing beyond "raising their profile" and submit to lawful suppression (such as the failed misinformation bill). If records, archives, and data lie (as we know they do) we can only raise their profile. If (dangerously) they expose wrong-doing kept secret, we are bound by established legal frameworks. If established legal frameworks forbid our revealing truth (or helping others to find it), so be it. If our specialised knowledge could assist "interpretation" (beyond facilitation), that is outside our remit.

If we have a role in interpretation (beyond facilitation), in being a part of the struggle to find truth, I for one don't subscribe to the view that it should be either passive or submissive. Could anyone plausibly argue that our appraisal role is either, even supposing it is exercised without restraint? We can't, of course, proclaim our intention to subvert the wishes of those who employ us. We must do as we are told; but I find no virtue in saying so.

**2025, January 4:**

### **Can Houses of Memory Defuse Passion (or, Should They Inflamm It)?**

This from an episode of *The West Wing* ("[The State Dinner](#)")

**ABBEY** So, what's on your mind?

**C.J.** I spoke to Peggy about the vermeil. You might get a few questions.

**ABBEY** I'm not embarrassed by the vermeil. It's not like we spent new money on it.

**C.J.** Yes, but it's history.

**ABBEY** It's our history. Better or worse, it's our history.

We're not going to lock it in the basement or brush it with a new coat of paint. It's our history.

**C.J.** Okay, well. Good answer.





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**ABBEY** You know, the truth will do it almost all the time.  
**C.J.** Yes, ma'am.

As that extract illustrates, there are always two questions: are the assets toxic and, if so, what should we do about it? It's always seemed to me that statue-toppling is not about the statues. It's about the self-righteousness of people who want to topple statues or (as they might see it) the virtue in erasing false memory or in replacing a false memory with a true one. The [Beeldenstorm](#) was never about "correcting" the understanding of God's purpose; it was about imposing a righteous view of Him and suppressing a deviant view (in the eyes of the destroyers).

- Is this substantively different from preserving toxic assets in houses of memory and contextualising them through description?
- How do we separate re-contextualisation in the service of Truth from partisan commitment? Should we even try?
- Is there a distinction to be made between reparation and curatorial dispassion?



A [report](#) published on 29 May, 2024, argues that houses of memory have a reparative role that goes way, way beyond curatorial dispassion:

During the global Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, statues of historical figures associated with racial injustice became the target of protesters. Many were toppled, including a statue of the English slave trader Edward Colston, which was torn down and throw into the canal in Bristol, his birthplace ... Four years later, following consultation with the local community, the statue has been given a new home in a quiet corner of Bristol's M Shed Museum ... On its side, surrounded by recreated placards from the protest, the statue and its subject's life and legacy is presented in a new light and within a new context - it tells the truth ...

Back home [in Australia] there are 200 statues dedicated to colonial figures. Just this month, the statue of ... William Crowther (known for removing the head from the body of an Aboriginal man and sending it to a London hospital) [became the latest in a series of colonial figures to be cut down at the ankles and toppled from their plinths](#). ... could statues toppled through acts of protest or activism, such as the Cook statue in Hyde Park on the eve of January 26, find a new home in museums alongside a more holistic truth-telling of their legacy?

Nathan "mudyi" Sentance, a Wiradjuri man and Head of First Nations collections at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, says it could be an approach to consider ... "In a museum, I believe that context is much more accessible ... I love the outcome of the Bristol museum example but it might not work in all museums and all communities, depending on what the community wants." ...

Asher Craig, Chair of the Bristol Legacy Foundation (BLF) ... said BLF is now focused on ensuring consultation that it conducts is weighted to bring Black voices to the fore in cases



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such as this and in representing Black history in the city. "... in all of my visits to different cities where they were doing some kind of commemoration or event around this, it was like 'Spot the Black person,'" said Ms Craig. "For us in Bristol, we're turning it on its head. We're in charge. We're going to tell those who have the power and the money." ... the BLF has been handed the responsibility of deciding what happens with the remaining plinth where the statue stood. Ms Craig said it will be the Black community at the centre of that decision.

Critics of the statue topplings have accused protesters of an erasure of history, but Sentance says when it comes to colonial statues standing on Aboriginal land, it's just the opposite. "There is a history that is embedded in the land," he said. "You may be tearing down trees that have centuries of knowledge or stories [attached] to them for a statue that tells a small story, so that in itself is erasing history." Mr Sentance said statues, in their current form, are one of the worst ways to learn about history and the truth. "Famously, the Cook statue in Hyde Park says he discovered Australia," he said. "Mob have been here since time immemorial, at least tens of thousands of years, so that's an inaccurate statement. "It can be argued that statues erase history. They're not really history tellers."

Without a hint of irony or hesitancy, Ms Craig aspires simply to replace those who used to be "in charge". One thing we know: there is no last word. We will, sooner or later, move on from the culture wars currently being waged between [DEI](#) and [IDW](#). But the search for Truth, whatever that is and wherever it leads, is never best served by listening to those who are "in charge" or think they ought to be.

### 2025, January 5:

Nathan "mudyi" Sentance, a Wiradjuri man and Head of First Nations collections at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, says "*There is a history that is embedded in the land ... You may be tearing down trees that have centuries of knowledge or stories [attached] to them for a statue that tells a small story, so that in itself is erasing history.*" But this suggests priority rather than multiplicity – a single superlative narrative rather than parallel ones. And we archivists know this view to be wrong.

There is no essential difference between throwing a painting of the Virgin Mary onto a bonfire and taking it out of its authentic context and placing it in a museum with a description based on [Calvinistic doctrine](#). A statue cut off at the knees and consigned to the M Shed Museum in Bristol has been decontextualised just as surely as the Elgin Marbles were two centuries ago when they were ripped from the Parthenon. For perfectly good reasons, the Marbles are now preserved in a museum. But since no museum can re-establish the original context physically, it hardly matters whether the museum is located in London or Athens provided they are being properly re-contextualised.

Apart from archives kept in the place where they were created (I believe the Irish State Papers Office in Dublin Castle was once an example, but I may have been misinformed about that when I visited) every archival "collection" consists of displaced artefacts. If that was what is meant by the term, I could even accept use of "collection" for what we do – viz. a gathering of decontextualised records removed from the place where they were formed whose original context we are striving to maintain intellectually. But, of course, that is not what other people mean when they use that term. Or do they?

Anyhow, the curatorial mission is to stipulate (describe) the context of the displaced stuff being held on the shelves to keep alive a memory of what it once was because that is important to an understanding of what it is. That stipulation involves perceiving without distortion the multiplicity of contexts and relationships in which and through which the records subsist and have subsisted. In the electronic environment, it is much easier to see how this volatile multiplicity doesn't just provide an insight into interpretation but also a necessary management tool since curation of electronic archives begins the moment you hit the save button.



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**Joanna Sassoon**

Hi Chris et al - As a citizen of Bristol just as it was starting to think about its slave past, the tobacco funding that supported the Museum and the experiments on animals in parts of the university, I retain an interest in the way the City has dealt with the toppling of the statue of slave trader Colston. To me, this has been one of the more mature options of how a city engages with its public to find ways to handle these statues - in this case post dunking in the Avon. This is in contrast to those views offered in Australia by the 'tear it down' historians who have yet to discuss what to do with the statues once the day has passed.

Here is [a piece](#) about the Bristol Museum exhibition and how they have contextualised the toppling of the statue and recontextualised the statue itself. And here for those who may not know, is [mention of the approach](#) taken to a monument in Fremantle valorising explorers in the early 1990's - rather than tearing the statue down, by adding to it.

**<<one of the more mature options of how a city engages with its public to find ways to handle these statues >>**

Recontextualising statues (and the Marbles, for that matter), because of their physicality and the nature of their audience ("its public"), involves different considerations to recontextualising archives, I think. We can probably say that our audience is more specialised (as to composition and numbers) and at the same time less focussed on particular instances. For most people, statues are display items of specific interest rather than materials for wide-ranging study so that (in the words of Nathan "mudiyi" Sentance) they tell "small stories".

That probably means there are subtle differences in the way we engage with our public. Not quite sure what they are but I guess they're to be found in the work being done to engage with indigenous and community groups.



**Bristol's M Shed**



**Public Consultation**

**2025, January 6:**

**<<... following consultation with the local community, the statue has been given a new home in a quiet corner of Bristol's M Shed Museum ... Nathan "mudiyi" Sentance ... says ... "In a museum, I believe that context is much more accessible ..." >>**

I think our view of "community" is self-serving. In the popular mind, Captain Cook discovered Australia and King Alfred burned the cakes. These are the superficial memories that go some way to binding a people together. They'll always be at that shallow level, and thank God for that. It's better than having nothing. I am under no illusion that this sentiment will be universally held, but it is appropriate as Australia Day approaches that I should celebrate our one-ness (in all our mongrel diversity) but I know that can never be sustained by complex and "nuanced" stories. Not to say there mayn't be a ripple effect derived from the insights of the well-informed but a statue of Captain Cook in Hyde Park bolsters the





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popular view. Removing it will not change that. The efforts of the virtuous, the schools, and the ABC might but I doubt their substitute narrative will, at the popular level, be any more profound (or true). It doesn't help, of course, that one-nation-ness is the mantra of one of the most divisive political forces in our land.

If most people have any ideas about archives, they are likely derived from a fleeting memory of stories around New Year's about what happened in the cabinet room thirty years ago. A puff-piece coming to them over their cornflakes in the silly season. I have worked on the [Constitutional Convention records](#), yet I had to endure listening to Paul Keating as Prime Minister deriding our Constitution as the work of British Imperialism. So it was, some will argue, if you dismiss non-indigenous settlement itself as merely an expression of British Imperialism (hardly British any longer). A cautious regard for one-ness does not exclude indigenous exceptionalism or a sentimental hankering after my own Irish heritage but it will not permit them to be exalted either. We sympathise with the Palestinians not because they were there first but because of the atrocities being visited on them now by the Israelis.

(Geez, is there anyone he won't offend?)

I'm a lousy interviewer. I go off-script. As you might imagine, when I once interviewed Frank Upward this reached epic proportions. I well remember one of Frank's comments (we were way beyond Q&A) about how to impress a minister with the importance of our work. Whatever's necessary, Frank said, but maybe we don't reveal to them our *secret motive* – our real reason for doing it. We are obedient to our masters and to our communities but we do what we do because that's what we do.

When a recontextualised artefact is preserved in a house of memory we have the luxury of listening to our communities because our exposure to the wider world (and consequently our effectiveness) is reduced. I used to stand in the Treaty Room at Archives NZ watching people come in, stop uncertainly, confused about what to do next. I used to imagine how (if we had the money) we could transform that experience for them into something magical. But it is self-indulgent to imagine that our sensitive curatorial work could ever have wide-spread impact. So what? Why should it? The harm comes with the delusion that we can change the world, that our impact is more than it really is. That delusion can mislead us into championing an agenda for change in place of a search for truth (and magic).

Don't get me wrong. I am no champion of boutique elitism. As a teacher (briefly), I refused to accept that a cerebral education was only for the intellectually gifted. As an archivist, I have given my life to upholding the centrality of memory in all our lives. But I have always understood this to be a struggle, a struggle without end, and not something to be found in a cozy conformity to prevailing community opinion.

... *a struggle without end* but not without purpose.

**2025, January 7:**

**<<I think our view of “community” is self-serving ... We are obedient to our masters and to our communities but we do what we do because that's what we do ... I have given my life to upholding the centrality of memory in all our lives. But I have always understood this to be a struggle, a struggle without end, and not something to be found in a cozy conformity to prevailing community opinion.>>**

I don't like trash-talking archives and I believe in the case for our social worth. I have argued it many, many times.

In Victoria, a former Chairman of the Public Service Board once sneeringly said to me (without knowing the facts, but that didn't deter him from trying to put me down) that Japan and Germany lost their archives in WW2 and they had successfully recovered without them. This was tosh, of course, but there was some truth in it, as I knew from the personal



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experience of sitting down to dinner in Canberra with an archivist from the Bundesarchiv who was trying to reconstitute German colonial archives out of their reach behind the Berlin Wall. On the basis of that conversation, perhaps a bit disingenuously, I responded by suggesting to the Chairman that maybe their successful post-war recovery was due in part to the dedication they put into trying to restore the archives they had lost.

As a friend said to me at around that time: *"It's no wonder they hate you!"*

There is a case to be made for the social value of archives, but it's got to be more sophisticated than *"We're listening"* or *"We have great stuff"*.

**2025, January 8:**

**<<There is a case to be made for the social value of archives, but it's got to be more sophisticated than *"We're listening"* or *"We have great stuff"*>>**

So, what is it?

Abraham Lincoln told of a king who ordered his wise men to tell him something that would be true at all times and in all situations. They replied: *And this too shall pass.*

Wouldn't it be great if we could say something that profound about what we do? If we had a boilerplate reply for supercilious chairmen of public service boards, sceptical accountants in treasuries, indifferent ministers, and Saturday morning shoppers in the Mt Druitt Westfield focussed on cost-of-living and the cricket. Something to convince bored relatives we see only at Christmas that what we do has some value and that our work involves more than handing flat plastic disks from which sound can be recovered. The kind of one-liner that teachers need to convince bored kids who would rather be surfing that some attention paid to Keats or Browning might be worth their time.

We have the words we use amongst ourselves, of course: *evidence, accuracy, authenticity, reliability, accountability, memory, truth even* but these convince no one but ourselves and a few sympathetic and insightful allies – not even the "tear it down" historians" of Joanna's imagination. There is no single formula or argument that makes our case. It must be done differently for every situation and for every audience in which we find ourselves. And it must be done with imagination and guile, "reading the room" as they say.

The SAA has a series of [Case Studies](#) focussing on "closely-defined area[s] of archival theory or practice ... [to] serve as examples of archival practice or illustrate issues worthy of broad discussion and debate." But these are inward-looking, navel-gazing exercises not something to justify ourselves to the society in which we live. Ditto [PROV](#).

[NAUK Case Studies](#) are more outwards looking and gather examples from all over, not just from within its own jurisdiction, e.g.

[Breaking down barriers and engaging new audiences](#) – "a community engagement project which took place in Manchester and Salford between 2014 and 2015 with 'hard-to-reach' working-class young men in their teens, many of whom had left the education system but were keenly involved in particular leisure activities such as boxing. The project used the young men's leisure passions as a medium through which to open up new learning opportunities. It broke down educational and cultural barriers, enabling them to discover the history and heritage of their leisure pursuit through archival research, story-telling, drama and film-making, and to share their findings with local communities through celebratory public events."

Ancestry.com and TV programmes in which celebrities find out "who they are" raise our profile somewhat. Some of this is covered in what we used to call [outreach](#) (maybe we still do) : *The ways to spread the word are varied, and archivists can be creative and have fun communicating their holdings' value.* But that's still an example of *"We have great stuff."* It



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doesn't speak to larger themes, something [beyond](#) "promotional activities to inform a potential user or visitor about your archive". Not saying all these aren't good and valuable, only that we need to have something strategic for a larger audience as well. Why archives? All this waffle tells you that it's a hard sell and that I don't have an easy answer. The closest I feel I've come over the years to a universal theme is an observation of what is rather than an exhortation to what should be:

***Mankind is a recordkeeping mammal.***

**2025, January 9:**

**<< What is important, what this failed legislation assailed, is the struggle to find Truth, not a belief that it can be imposed. How thick are/were the bill's proponents if they supposed that having established a mechanism to impose truths they agreed with, that same mechanism would not one day be used to impose truths they reviled?>>**

And now, a change of mechanism will release the truths they revile apparently. Article in [The Conversation](#) (8 Jan., 2024) :

Meta [has announced](#) it will abandon its fact-checking program, starting in the United States.

One has to wonder if this is a result of confidence stemming from the pending Trump/Musk ascendancy. But take heart warriors against misinformation, Trump's principles (such as they are) are as capricious as the Red Queen's. According to the ACLU he was [once a foe](#) of the First Amendment (back in 2016) -

... Trump has made it very clear that he doesn't stand for the freedom of the press. As a presidential candidate, he [told](#) supporters he would "open up our libel laws" to sue journalists. "We're going to have people sue you like you've never got sued before," he promised.

**2025, January 12:**

And now, another word contrived to make a difference: "*independence*"

Donald Trump has revived calls made in his first presidency for the US to buy the icy and sparsely populated Danish protectorate of Greenland ... home to little more than 56,000 people. The former Danish colony, now an Inuet-led autonomous territory under the protection of Denmark, occupies an important strategic position between the US and Europe ... The US already has a presence on Greenland via the Pituffik Space Base (formerly the Thule Air Base), while Russia also sees the region as a strategic opportunity. The territory is also rich with natural resources, including rare earth minerals, and occupies a strategic location for trade ...

... Greenland has long been in the sights of the US ... When president Andrew Johnson bought Alaska in 1867, he also considered purchasing Greenland. President Woodrow Wilson attempted to again buy Greenland in 1917 ... At the end of World War II, the US Truman administration [reportedly offered Denmark](#) \$100 million for the island ... Global rare earth production is dominated by China, which has previously [threatened to restrict](#) the export of minerals and associated technologies ... The reduction in ice has expanded arctic shipping routes and has increased the time they can be navigated during the Northern Hemisphere summer ... There is also the possibility that melting ice could make Greenland's natural resources easier to access ...

Deakin University's Professor Andrew Scott, who focuses on Nordic affairs, said the official position of Greenland was independence from Denmark ... Greenland has been looking to boost its independence by diversifying its economy away from fishing, but still relies on a roughly US\$500 million (\$800 million) annual grant from Denmark ... "What would Greenland do if Trump offered, say, US\$1 billion (\$1.6 billion) a year to have a different kind of association?" [Dodds] said.

[New Daily](#) 8 January, 2025 (source Fox News)





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Jerome, *Ecclesiastes* (in the [Vulgate](#)): *nihil novi sub sole* ([nothing new](#) under the sun).

**PS.** What “*independence*” means in Greenland (including a Grexit apparently):

... From 1814 to 1953, Greenland was a territory, not independent and not part of Denmark, but directly controlled by the Danish government ... During the [Second World War](#), Denmark was [occupied and controlled](#) by [Nazi Germany](#) between 1940 and 1945. As a result, the Danish and US governments signed an agreement to hand over defense and control of Greenland to the United States on 9 April 1941 (the Danish government was represented by the [Danish ambassador to the US](#), as the US did not recognize the Nazi government of Denmark) ... Greenland was effectively independent during these years and allowed the United States to build bases on its territory, in spite of the Danish pre-war neutrality.

After the war the pre-war situation was restored, the US bases remained and Denmark, with Greenland as a part of the Kingdom, joined [NATO](#). In 1953, a new [Danish Constitution](#) incorporated Greenland into Denmark, the island thereby gained representation in the [Danish Parliament](#) and was recognized as a Danish [province](#) known as the [County of Greenland](#) ... In 1979, the Danish government granted [Greenland home rule](#), with Denmark keeping control of a number of areas including foreign relations, defense, currency matters, and the legal system in Greenland. Greenland's minimal representation in the Danish Folketing meant that, although over 70% of Greenlanders had opposed entry into the European [Common Market](#) (EEC), it nevertheless joined in 1973 as part of Denmark

... After home rule was secured, a bare majority (53%) of Greenland's population voted on 23 February 1982 to leave the EEC, a process which lasted until 1985. This resulted in the [Greenland Treaty of 1985](#). In 2008, Greenland's citizens approved the [Greenlandic self-government referendum](#) with a 75% vote in favor of a higher degree of autonomy. Greenland took control of [law enforcement](#), the [coast guard](#), and the legal system. The official language changed from Danish to [Greenlandic](#) on 21 June 2009 ...

... As part of the self-rule law of 2009 (section §21), Greenland can declare full independence if it wishes to pursue it, but it would have to be approved by a referendum among the Greenlandic people<sup>L</sup> and the Danish parliament ...

[Wikipedia](#)



**2025, February 1:**

<<24 Nov., 2024: Communications Minister Michelle Rowland has confirmed the government will pull a controversial Bill attempting to combat misinformation and disinformation ...>>

<<25 Nov., 2024: How thick are/were the bill's proponents if they supposed that having established a mechanism to impose truths they agreed with, that same mechanism would not one day be used to impose truths they reviled?>>

Nice! [Dealing with "misinformation" within a r/keeping framework](#).

Only in America (thank God).



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

On Thursday, the Trump administration ordered the US agriculture department to unpublish its websites documenting or referencing the climate crisis. By Friday, the landing pages on the United States Forest Service website for key resources, research and adaptation tools – including those that provide vital context and vulnerability assessments for wildfires – had gone dark, leaving behind an error message or just a single line: “You are not authorized to access this page.” ... The changes are part of a dizzying flurry of orders reshaping the federal government’s policies on global heating ...

The government website was one of many that were affected on Friday by new directives from the Trump administration on what information federal agencies can publish. Several went dark on Friday as agencies scrambled to comply with Donald Trump’s executive orders declaring his administration would recognize only two genders and ordering an end to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives ... On Friday, USDA officials clarified that the content should not be deleted. **“USDA needs to adhere to requirements around records retention**, so Archive or Unpublish [sic] landing pages focused on climate change,” an email sent to agency public affairs directors read ...

It is unclear what the agencies will do with the websites or the policies and studies once detailed on them; links to the landing pages are still live, even if the information on each page has been archived.

### 2025, February 2:

**<< It is unclear what the agencies will do with the websites or the policies and studies once detailed on them; links to the landing pages are still live, even if the information on each page has been archived>>**

#### End of Term Web Archive

The End of Term Web Archive captures and saves U.S. Government websites at the end of presidential administrations. The EOT has thus far preserved websites from administration changes in 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020. We are currently accepting [URL nominations for the End of Term 2024 Web Archive](#). The End of Term Web Archive contains federal government websites (.gov, .mil, etc) in the Legislative, Executive, or Judicial branches of the government. Websites that were at risk of changing (i.e., [whitehouse.gov](#)) or disappearing altogether during government transitions were captured. Local government websites, or any other site not part of the federal government domain were out of scope.

For the End of Term 2024, [partners](#) have joined efforts again to preserve public United States Government websites at the conclusion of the presidential administration ending January 20, 2025. This web harvest – like its predecessors in 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020 – is intended to document the federal government’s presence on the World Wide Web during the transition of presidential administrations and to enhance the existing collections of the partner institutions.

#### Library of Congress Web Archives, 2000-present.

"Thousands of sites have been preserved in a variety [of] event and thematic Web archives, selected by subject specialists." Collections include the [United States Congressional](#), [Public Policy Topics](#), [United States Elections](#), [Legal Blawgs](#), [Iraq War 2003](#), [September 11, 2001](#), [Webcomics](#), [Brazil Cordel Literature](#), [Visual Image](#), [Indonesian General Election 2009](#) web archives, and many more.

#### Federal Depository Library Program Web Archive, Government Publishing Office.

"The FDLP Web Archive provides point in time captures of U.S. Federal agency websites, while preserving the functionality of the site to the extent possible. The aim is to provide permanent public access to Federal Agency Web content. GPO harvests and archives the websites with Archive-It, a subscription-based Web harvesting and archiving service offered by the Internet Archive."

What happens (e.g. to funding for Library of Congress and Government Publishing Office) when Trump & Co. realise that the information they have just suppressed may be preserved



## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

by zealous knowledge-workers? When do the censorious turn their attention away from purveyors of forbidden information and onto the efforts of those of us who preserve it?

**2025, March 12:**

<<4 May, 2023: *As with so many rational decisions, making it more accurate also brings confusion*, notes Charles Stuckey ... “What is a woman, Prime Minister?” [Piers Morgan] asked. Mr Albanese replied: “An adult female.”>>

The publisher of the Newcastle Herald, Australian Community Media, removed the ad from its digital edition on Tuesday and apologised, [telling readers the ad did not meet its values as a company](#) ... journalists from the Age, published by [Nine Entertainment](#), wrote a formal letter of complaint to management after discovering the same ad was slated to be published on the front page of the Age on Wednesday. Sources told Guardian Australia accepting the ad for publication was a “slap in the face” for staff and readers, and did not align with the newspaper’s editorial stance on marriage equality ...

The Newcastle Herald apology came after staff wrote to management saying the ad was “an insult to the work that we do, and to the sources and readers we represent”. “The decision to publish an advertisement that does not reflect our commitment to journalistic integrity, our standards of publication, the diversity of the community, or the values that we profess to uphold is repellent to us and is clearly represented by the inundation of rightful complaints that staff have been dealing with this morning,” the letter, seen by Guardian Australia, said ... In 2021 Nine rejected ads from Palmer that it considered contravened government issued-health advice on vaccines, but [accepted anti-lockdown ads](#).



It appears that Clive Palmer is trying to be a poor man’s Trump. His attempts to run a “gender ad” are facing [push-back](#) from “furious” journalists.

The Newcastle Herald has apologised for publishing a front page ad from Clive Palmer’s new [Trumpet of Patriots](#) party which says “there are only two genders”, as journalists at the Age say they are “furious” the Melbourne newspaper has apparently accepted the same ad for publication. In the past week the Age has published Palmer’s anti-immigration and anti-welcome to country advertisements, which have also appeared in News Corp publications ...

Leaving aside the ethical question whether or not professional integrity (journalistic or ours) encompasses “values” that determine not just how information is relayed but whether it is relayed at all, how are we to differentiate fact from opinion? The World Health Organization (for as long as it continues to exist without US funding) [distinguishes them](#) thus:

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.

Pretty conventional stuff for our times – sex is a fact and gender is an opinion. Alternatively, it is possible that “non-binary” means [just what it says](#) (viz. more than two or neither one nor the other):

Most cultures use a gender binary, in which gender is divided into two categories, and people are considered part of one or the other (girls/women and boys/men); those who are outside these groups may fall under the umbrella term *non-binary*. A number of societies have specific genders besides “man” and “woman,” such as the hijras of South Asia and Two-spirit Indigenous Peoples of North America; these are often referred to as *third genders* (and *fourth genders*, etc.).





## WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES

binary: something made of two things or parts ... a division into two groups or classes that are considered diametrically opposite.

But Merriam-Webster appropriately takes an entomological approach to the vexed question:

### **gender noun**

**1a** : a subclass within a grammatical class (such as noun, pronoun, adjective, or verb) of a language that is partly arbitrary but also partly based on distinguishable characteristics (such as shape, social rank, manner of existence, or sex) and that determines agreement with and selection of other words or grammatical forms see also natural gender

**b** : membership of a word or a grammatical form in such a subclass

**c** : an inflectional form (see inflection sense 2a) showing membership in such a subclass

**2a** : sex sense 1a

the feminine *gender*

**b** : the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex

**c** : gender identity

The words *sex* and *gender* have a long and intertwined history. In the 15th century *gender* expanded from its use as a term for a grammatical subclass to join *sex* in referring to either of the two primary biological forms of a species, a meaning *sex* has had since the 14th century ... In the 20th century *sex* and *gender* each acquired new uses. *Sex* developed its "sexual intercourse" meaning in the early part of the century ... and a few decades later *gender* gained a meaning referring to the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex, as in "gender roles." Later in the century, *gender* also came to have application in two closely related compound terms: gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female, some combination of male and female, or neither male nor female; gender expression refers to the physical and behavioral manifestations of one's gender identity. By the end of the century *gender* by itself was being used as a synonym of *gender identity*.

Among those who study gender and sexuality, a clear delineation between *sex* and *gender* is typically prescribed, with *sex* as the preferred term for biological forms, and *gender* limited to its meanings involving behavioral, cultural, and psychological traits. In this dichotomy, the terms male and female relate only to biological forms (*sex*), while the terms masculine/masculinity, feminine/femininity, woman/girl, and man/boy relate only to psychological and sociocultural traits (*gender*). This delineation also tends to be observed in technical and medical contexts, with the term *sex* referring to biological forms in such phrases as *sex hormones*, *sex organs*, and *biological sex*. But in nonmedical and nontechnical contexts, there is no clear delineation, and the status of the words remains complicated ...

Would it be naïve to suppose that Palmer's ads are simply a well-meaning attempt to validate the binary approach to Gender Indicators taken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics towards "*economic and social indicators comparing males and females including gender pay gap and life expectancy*"? I suppose it would.



### These words/sayings are prohibited in my classroom!

If you are caught using these words, you will write a short essay explaining why you chose to use these words in an academic setting to express yourselves. There are many ways to articulate what you need to say without using slang. Please know that using slang in an academic setting can diminish your capability to become a successful writer. More often than not, the way you speak is the way you will write. The gibberish some of you choose to use is improper English and sometimes inappropriate for an academic setting. This is an educational institution, and you will carry yourself as scholars in my classroom!

1. Bruh
2. Standing on business (SOB)
3. Ooh-wee, Skee-Yee
4. Skee-Yee
5. You ate that up!
6. That's Cap
7. What's up gang?
8. Bet!
9. Oh my God Ms. T!
10. On God
11. On my momma!
12. On my Dead (mom, dad, aunt, cousin, any family)
13. Rizz





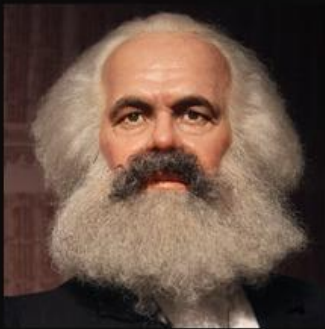
Lewis Carroll



When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.' 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.' 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master — that's all.

AZ QUOTES

Karl Marx



Go on, get out - last words are for fools who haven't said enough. To his housekeeper, who urged him to tell her his last words so she could write them down for posterity.

AZ QUOTES