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**TITLE: JOHN HOWARD: CONSERVATISM,
MEMORY AND CELEBRATION**

John Howard: Conservatism, Memory and Celebration

The way in which a country interprets memory and history, is the foundation on which its identity is formed. John Howard, in his Prime-Ministership, contributed significantly to this sense of identity, through his re-emphasis of Anzac Day, and in particular, the concept of mateship. Throughout his time within politics, Howard became engulfed in a conflict with former Prime Minister, Paul Keating, aptly named the 'culture wars'. Paul Keating's want for a reformation of Australian identity was the catalyst for Howard's pursuit of a traditional Australian identity, not formed in spite of history, but through it. This aim, though personally integral to Howard, also had a political motive. By linking the ANZAC value of mateship with his brand of political conservatism, Howard was able to attach his policies as an integral and direct part of Australian identity itself, thus maintaining support within the electorate. However, Howard's main goal, relative to his contribution to celebration, memory and history, was the creation of a 'mainstream' Australia. Through his propagation of ANZAC Day as a central focus of culture, Howard was able to create a consensus of Australian values; a common event through which the country shared in nationalistic sentiments of mateship, sacrifice, and an attitude of protectionism towards these values. Thus, Howard essentially turned an interpretation of Australian history into a specific culture of politically-supported memory and celebration.

There can be no doubt that Howard's interpretation of Australian identity was embedded in his own personal, core beliefs. For Howard, the 'culture war' was one between intellectual progressions for the sake of 'academic' development, and the core values which he believed had made Australia a successful country. God, patriotism and the family were concepts to Howard that defined an Australia in a constant relationship with its history, and with a particular connection with the ANZAC Myth¹. It was this relationship that Howard identified with as traditionally Australian; a personal identification reinforced within his own personal relationships. Indeed, within his own immediate family, Howard's wife, Jeanette, was a high-school teacher who had taught, and analysed, this interpretation of Australia. However, in an interview with Paul Kelly, Howard revealed where the essence of these beliefs relative to Australian identity originated.

"We fought as an Australian army... I still have a memory of seeing an old diary of my father's from World War I with an entry written in September 1918 and the line simply read 'Relieved by a Pommy division'."²

¹ Kelly P 2009, p. 328

² Kelly P 2001, p. 246

Howard's sense of Australian identity, in the form of nationalism, therefore, came from deep filial roots. It was inherently a part of him, as Howard described it later on in life, 'instinctive' within his collective sense of self³. Indeed, Instinctive is a key word in analysing Howard's contribution to Australian celebration and history, for it implies that his arguments were morally based. Howard had no theoretical or intellectual basis from which he interpreted Australian identity. Rather he, as Paul Kelly describes, 'felt it'⁴. Howard, thus saw a 'high jacking' of this intrinsic Australian identity by Keating and other intellectual institutions trying to, as he believed, destroy this idea of Australian culture through the degradation of memory and history. Howard understood his purpose as being to re-form this collective Australian memory, to recognise 'instinctively', the Australian nationalism that he interpreted to have existed since 1918 and to be at the celebratory core of Australian identity.

However, understanding the implication of Howard's ideals on Australia cannot be appreciated with any sense of completion without an analysis of the 'culture war' itself, as defined in the conflict between two Australian Prime Ministers, Keating and Howard. As Kelly suggests, an understanding of the implication of Howard's cultural traditionalism cannot be complete without an analysis of Keating's effects on cultural policy⁵. Keating, in essence, wanted to create a new, independent Australian national identity by virtue of a new perspective of Australian history. As James Curran argues, Keating's mission was not just centred on progressive policy; he wanted to redefine the nation⁶. Keating's perspective relative to this reform was similar to Howard's in that it was grounded in what Paul Kelly describes as 'faith'; the belief in an almost religious kind of atonement, recognising the faults of past representations of Australian history, and moving forward with a new identity⁷. The primary way in which Keating tried to shift the Australian perspective was through his revisionist view of Australian military history, with Kokoda replacing Gallipoli as the epitome and definition of the Australian spirit. In 1992, Keating visited the Kokoda Trail, and proclaimed Gallipoli as an 'indissoluble' memory⁸. Kokoda for Keating, was the symbol of an Australia fighting for itself, in independence and defiance. Kokoda became Keating's representation of his new vision for Australia, uninhibited from stifling cultural ties, and inherently linked with the Asia-pacific region⁹. Gallipoli, concurrently, was an event that was attached to an old Imperial identity, and most importantly for Keating, a wrong identity, propagated by backward thinking conservatives, such as Howard.

³ Op.cit., 2009 p. 333

⁴ Ibid., 2009 p. 334

⁵ Op.cit., 2009 p. 29

⁶ Curran J 2004, p. 192

⁷ Op.cit., 2009 p. 148

⁸ Paul Keating, Anzac Day Speech 1992

⁹ Op.cit., 2009 p. 153

“And at the wrong moment in history the country ended up with somebody driving ambitiously in reverse.”¹⁰

It was Keating’s indifference towards Gallipoli in particular that confirmed his demise at the 1996 election. This defeat was seen by Howard as more than a political victory, it was a decision by the Australian people as to the firm, cultural identity of a core Australia which Howard always knew existed. Indeed the swing of 5.1% of the primary vote against Labor, seemed to confirm that Keating’s views regarding restructuring Australian memory, did not correspond with the view of the majority of the Australian public¹¹. Indeed, Kelly writes that Australians had begun an unofficial patronage towards Gallipoli from 1990, two years before Keating tried to change an already moving tide towards a nationalism formed from within Australia’s conventional history¹². But a question arises here. If the virtue of Australia’s reaffirmation of nationalism already existed before Howard’s Prime-Ministership, what effect did he have on celebration, memory and history? The answer lies within Howard’s reformation of Australian conservatism.

Conservatism, under the Liberal party, and John Howard, incorporated five main beliefs. These, according to Norman Abjorensen, were: support for private enterprise, individual freedoms, opposition to constitutional reforms, reliance on major world powers, and a disregard for the trade union movement¹³. Thus, it can be seen from Abjorensen’s definition, that the Liberal party, was defined by what it was against, much more than what it was for. It had a negligible part in any proposed re-forming of Australian identity and the election victory in 1996, allowed Howard to confront this. Convinced, of Australia’s historic nationalistic sentiment, Howard now set about creating a new definition for conservatism in Australia. From now on, Howard would seek to shape the argument of culture, as a politician.¹⁴

‘Our policies have mirrored the Australian character, Australian priorities- in short, the Australian way’.¹⁵

Howard would therefore reform the ‘anti-Labor’ view of conservatism, by explicitly re-connecting it to the ‘Bradman and Anzac’ view of the national narrative¹⁶. Thus, Howard specifically recruited the

¹⁰ Megalogenis G 2006 p. 311

¹¹ Manne R 2004, p. 6

¹² Op.cit., 2009 p. 154

¹³ Abjorensen N 2008 p. 31

¹⁴ Op.cit., 2009 p. 330

¹⁵ John Howard 1999 The Australian Way

¹⁶ Op.cit., 2009 p. 328

values of ANZAC Day into the ideology of his government, even to the point of including mateship in the proposed 1999 constitutional pre-amble, as he started to define his government in relation to nationalism¹⁷. Whatever neo-liberalistic aim Howard had, in for example, the privatisation of Telstra, could therefore also be re-set within this ideological basis. In effect, Howard represented his government as a personification of central Australian values. Howard effectively changed the definition of conservatism whereby conservatism became, no more about opposition and the hindrance of progression, but rather an ideology which defended Australian values. The best example of this is Howard's social policy. Howard successfully convinced the Australian public, that through his integration policies, accentuated by mandatory detention, intrinsic Australian values, such as mateship constructed as a common spirit of togetherness, would be protected and celebrated because Australia, under Howard and conservatism, had become the country of ANZAC virtue.

"Australia is a magnet for people of all corners of the Globe, not because of what it might become, but what it has become."¹⁸

However, Howard's definition of conservatism, as rooted in ANZAC virtue, relied on the most important aspect of his impact on celebration memory and history - that of the perceived creation of a mainstream Australian society. For Howard's political reforms to work, the Australian public needed to be convinced of a defining monolithic quality within the values of the country, in the sense that there actually existed a 'mainstream', Australia. Without this concept, Howard's agenda could not resonate with the Australian people for it had very little independent, intellectual, or philosophical basis¹⁹. As Peter Van Onselen states, Howard grasped at every opportunity, to define his decisions, within the 'national interest', without providing a sense of vision and perspective as to what the national interest was²⁰. In short, Howard relied on the premise that Australia had an already-formed intellectual and philosophical basis for its identity, as a part of its history. The problem was, for Howard, that in many instances this proved difficult to actually locate. For example, Howard, according to Kelly, faced severe resistance to his attachment of cultural traditionalism to his policies by, arguably, the two key cultural institutions within the country - universities and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)²¹. It was clear that Howard's perception that the culture war had been won in 1996, was severely premature. Keating had succeeded in winning over the intellectuals, the places which guided the writers and journalists who

¹⁷ Op.cit., 2004 p. 23

¹⁸ John Howard The National Press Club Address 25 January 2001

¹⁹ Op.cit., 2009 p. 331

²⁰ Onselen PV, Errington R 2007 p. 370

²¹ Ibid., 2007 p. 378

would define, by default the nation's culture through comment and media. Thus, Howard functioning as a politician relative to the culture war had the chance of failing, within this counter argument.

"His government, formally, or informally, was pitted against many centres of cultural and intellectual life".²²

Howard, as David Marr suggests, had to shift core perception²³. He certainly could not fully control the culturally progressive ideas of the ABC or universities, no matter how many cultural-friendly board members he might deliberately place in charge of those institutions²⁴. He simply had to remove any counter ideas from the national culture by creating the perception of 'mainstream' or, as Marr comments, the 'exaltation of the average'²⁵. Howard initially tried to promote 'traditional views' via the wider dissemination of his own personal definitions of Australian history. He therefore fought an eleven-year battle with teachers' unions to maintain a view of history identifiable with traditional Australian historic values.²⁶ However, where this battle was most apparent was within Australia's referendum regarding the formation of a Republic. Howard centred the 1999 referendum on two main concepts which would either refute or consolidate his political model of conservatism. Firstly, through Keating's advocacy of a republic as a refutation of British values, Howard looked for a sense within the Australian people that, rather than accept this negative view of history, the people would rather counter-affirm their faith in the virtue of their history.

"...they won't accept that we ought to become a republic because what's gone before is inferior and we should really be ashamed of all that so-called subservience".²⁷

In relation to this virtue, Howard used the republic debate as a way to consolidate his position, advocating the Governor-General model. He argued that the Governor-General was the virtual head of state. But as Kelly suggests, Howard's real achievement was that he "*...cleared the path towards his own radical-conservative Australian model: a strong prime minister, an absent Governor-General and an absent head of state*"²⁸. In a sense, the referendum confirmed to Howard his license to represent the Australian people, to create his mainstream society that was somewhat in doubt in his own mind, after the 1998 election. He had reserved the only real power within the Australian

²² Op.cit., 2009 p. 331

²³ Marr D 2007, p. 46

²⁴ Onselen PV, Errington R 2007: Suggests Howard appointed friendly political supporters such as Windschuttle to the board, since the late 90's

²⁵ Marr D 2007, p. 47

²⁶ Op.citi., 2009 p. 331

²⁷ Megalogenis G 2004, p. 307

²⁸ Op.cit. 2009, p. 517

parliamentary system through Australia's affirmation of history and identity. He believed he could consequently refuse to 'engage', the academics within their territory²⁹, and maintain an attitude towards these institutions of ambivalence and 'splendid isolation', wherein he could continue, through the advocacy and celebration of these values, to promote his neo-liberalist agenda, such as the GST, as representative of mainstream opinion.

Finally, for Howard's model of political conservatism to take form, he knew there had to be a definable event through which Australians could recognise, identify with and celebrate the 'national interest', as identified by the historical memory that Howard himself identified with. He needed to create a focal point within Australian history through which commonality could ultimately be realised. He turned to the concept of celebration. A celebration, in historical terms is a coming together of people, relative to a recognised similar value³⁰. Howard turned Australian history into a celebration through his advocacy of ANZAC Day. As Marilyn Lake describes, Howard created a perception of history that was ..."nationalist and determinedly celebratory"³¹. This idea of celebration is common throughout Howard's commemoration speeches in this period. On ANZAC Day in 2003 he commented that,

"Anzac Day was not about glorification of war. It is about a celebration of some wonderful values of courage, and valour, of mateship, of decency, of a willingness as a nation to do the right thing, whatever the cost"³².

Anzac Day, under Howard became a celebration of commonality to which he could link, connect and communicate the core identity of his Government. Later on in his speech, for example, he links the Anzac virtue of 'doing the right thing', to the war in Iraq. *'They went in our name in a just cause to do good things to liberate a people. They are part of a great tradition of honourable service by the Australian military forces.'*³³ Howard was under no illusion of the importance of this celebration, and it is here we find his real effect on Australian perception of identity relative to celebrations, memory and history, in that John Howard significantly enhanced the renewal of celebration of Anzac Day.

A singular part of Prime Minister Howard's contribution to celebration, memory and history, in Australia was then to play a significant role in the resetting of traditional Australian values through a

²⁹ Ibid., 2009 p. 338

³⁰ This is my own personal definition, through the interpretation of ANZAC day.

³¹ Lake M 2007 'Independent Histories'.

³² John Howard's Address at the ANZAC Day Parade 2003

³³ Ibid., 2003

personal and policy-driven affirmation of ANZAC Day. Through his personal belief, inherently centred on his family experience, that Australia had an already fully formed Nationalism, he became the anti-thesis to Keating, in the 'culture' war' that enveloped Australian society for much of the late 20th Century. This sentiment played a significant part in defining one of Howard's major roles; that of reforming Australia's perception of conservatism. Through Howard, the definition of conservatism became not what it was against, but what it protected relative to core Australian values. But perhaps Howard's most important contribution to Australian cultural history was his creation of the 'mainstream society'. In consequence of a conservative momentum, begun at the Republican Referendum, Howard started to mould a commonality of national values through ANZAC day, and a reaffirmation of Australia's western cultural legacy. Thus, he justified his negligence of academia and communication with perceived 'culturally unfriendly' institutions such as the ABC, through a counter emphasis on celebration. The ANZAC tradition, as particularly represented by ANZAC Day, was the physical manifestation through which Howard transformed Australian history, affirmed his policy, and created a new political definition of his ideology. Howard's society, though, centred in political ideological reformation, ultimately could not last, devoid of any progressive narrative. Howard, although he did not recognise it, was therefore much like Keating in terms of his desire to rewrite history, this time, though, in terms of his own political philosophy and party. It was, however, this centring of the past, itself so crucial to Howard's Australia, which dictated its end, for new millennia Australians needed a new identity, inclusive of celebrating the past, but not centred on it. Ultimately, the celebration would therefore remain; but Howard would not.

Bibliography

Secondary Sources

Abjorensen N 2008, *John Howard and The Conservative Tradition*, Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, Melbourne, Australia.

This source was especially useful, in obtaining an idea firstly of the essence of Howard's political beliefs. From here, I was able to, with the help of this source make conclusions about the importance of ANZAC day, in helping to reform Howard's ideology of conservatism to modern Australian politics.

Curran J 2004, *The Power of Speech*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, Australia.

This source was helpful to me in gaining an idea of Paul Keating's purpose in waging the Culture War with Howard, in the sense that he wanted to redefine the nation.

Kelly P 2001, *100 Years*, Allen & Unwin, Alexander St, Crows Nest, NSW.

This source contained an interview with Howard, that was relevant to establishing his views on ANZAC day.

Kelly P 2009, *The March of Patriots: The Struggle for Modern Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Australia.

This was my main source, in researching for this essay. The detailed descriptions it gives, on Howard's policies, relative to Australia's culture, was essential to the development of my thesis. I used it as a basis, to which I could base my arguments, with the wide contextual view I gained from this source.

Lake M 2007, *Independent Histories*, Dissent, No 23.

This was the source that gave me the original idea, of Howard reforming ANZAC day as a celebration. From here, I was able to draw in other evidence and start to establish this argument more fully.

Manne R (Editor) 2004, *The Howard Years*, Schwartz Publishing, Melbourne, Australia.

I used this source to gain some figures, relative to Howard's victory in the 1996 election, and what this meant relative to the development of the Culture War.

Marr D 2007, *His Master's Voice: The Corruption of Public Debate Under Howard*, Schwartz Publishing, Melbourne Australia.

I used this source as the basis for the argument, in which I detail Howard's procedure, in forming and trying to shift Australian perception towards the mainstream.

Megalogenis G 2006, *The Longest Decade*, Scribe Publications Pty Ltd, Victoria, Australia.

This source contained a section where Howard and Keating spoke relative to their views on each other. Although, interesting in gaining an overall perspective, in regards to my essay it provided some quotes which I could use to support, a section of my argument, in which I discuss the Republic and Howard.

Onselen PV 2007, *John Winston Howard*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Australia.

This source, provided an account of Howard's dealing with the ABC, which I used within my essay, as a discussion of Howard's interactions with Cultural institutions

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John Howard's Address to the ANZAC Day Parade Canberra 2003, sourced from, The National Library of Australia- 'Pandora: Australia's Web Archive' <<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/10052/20080108-1314/livetest.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2003/speech94.html>>.

This source provided an official context, or basis in which Howard projected his views on ANZAC day. I thus found it very useful as a basis, on which to clarify what Howard viewed the purpose of ANZAC Day to be for Australia.

John Howard's Address to the National Press Club 25 January 2001, sourced from, The National Library of Australia- 'Pandora: Australia's Web Archive' <<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/10052/200603210000/www.pm.gov.au/news/speeches/speech1754.html>>.

This primary source was an example of Howard's ANZAC values, coming through into his policy, an integral example to support my argument.

Paul Keating's Anzac Day Address Port Moresby 1992, sourced from, The National Library of Australia- 'Pandora: Australia's Web Archive' <<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/10185/20100305-1400/www.keating.org.au/cfm/value11.html>>.

This source, provided a comparison point, relative to Keating's views on ANZAC day and Howard's, something I used to advance my argument.

John Howard: The Australian Way 1999, sourced from, The National Library of Australia- 'Pandora: Australia's Web Archive' <<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/21947/200111120000/vcepolitics.com/executive/howard/990128australianway.html>>

This source was probably, the most useful; Primary Source, as it detailed specifically, how Howard, in his own words, used Australian Culture, memory and history, to his own political advantage. In this sense it was a priceless, piece of evidence to use, in which I could clarify my argument.