

ON AUSTRALIA DAY

Thoughts on our Australia Day 'Morning of Mourning' ceremony. by former City of Port Phillip councillor DAVID BRAND

There are many reasons for wanting to change the date of the day we celebrate Australia. But there are reasons, too, for keeping it where it is. Here's why I think genuine reconciliation might be better served not by splitting our foundation-day / invasion-day ceremonies apart, on different days, but keeping them bound together (perhaps uncomfortably) on the one day, where they both belong.

As long as Australia Day is tied to a specific starting date of European colonisation, it is *inescapable* that the story we tell of this country's history since then will include two inseparable truths:

On the one hand, **it is a story of brilliant nation-building** (one of the truly great success stories of modern, globalised humanity).

On the other hand, **it is a tale of shocking and unconscionable dispossession** (the genocidal displacement of what were, to that point, the world's most ancient, enduring, indigenous peoples).

Since that day, *every* Australian who has arrived on this continent – whether by plane or boat, or by *birth* -- has found themselves, for better or worse, cast inextricably in the middle of this contradictory, double-edged national story. Whatever our ancestry, we are all participants in this historical situation we have inherited, and we all have our hopes, and responsibilities, for its future. This is our shared context, as living Australians, *today*. Whatever we make of Australia Day, *this* is the common set of circumstances we commemorate, that we celebrate, as well as mourn, and that we, in unison, aspire to improve.

How we respond to these historical contradictions, these conflicting emotions, is our *real* issue. And *how* we gradually resolve and reconcile them may be gauged, year by year, each Australia Day, as a measure of our ultimate success as a nation.

I see no value at all in setting one day aside for unrestrained flag-waving and self-congratulation, and another for too easily marginalised sorrow and angst. We are perfectly capable of holding two not-entirely reconciled thoughts in our head at the same time. We already do it beautifully, on Australia Day, with the Welcome to Country in our citizenship ceremonies. As a nation, we already do it masterfully on ANZAC day -- where national pride, *and* sorrow, march hand in hand.