The Australian National History Curriculum:

Politics at Play

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Synopsis

In 2006, Prime Minister John Howard’s call for the ‘root and branch renewal’ of Australian history initiated an ideologically driven process of developing an Australian national history curriculum which was completed by the Labor Government in 2012. Rather than being focussed on pedagogy, the process was characterised by the use of the curriculum as an ideological tool. This thesis provides accounts of some of the key events during this period and engages with the conceptual debates that underlie the history curriculum being invested with such potent cultural authority.
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Introduction: Setting the Scene

As John Howard approached the tenth anniversary of his Prime Ministership he delivered the Australia Day Address at the National Press Club in Canberra on 25 January, 2006. In this address he outlined his vision for the future, emphasising the necessity for Australians to be proud of their history. Howard despaired at the ordinary Australian’s lack of awareness of what he perceived to be the nation’s achievements. He blamed this on the ‘stew of themes and issues’ taught as history in schools. As a remedy, Howard proposed a ‘root and branch renewal’ of Australian history in schools, implying an overhaul of the history curriculum. This thesis explores a number of key events relating to the development of a national history curriculum in Australia from 2006 to 2013 and the politicised environment in which they took place. Howard’s Australia Day Address marked the beginning of the period in which history moved nationally from a marginalised to a core school subject when State and Territory Education Ministers signed off on a mandatory national history curriculum on 12 December, 2012. While Howard’s Coalition Government began the process, the national history curriculum was realised by the Federal Labor Government following a highly controversial process characterised by ideologically driven political intervention.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the development of the Australian national history curriculum. It will discuss the approaches taken by the Coalition and Labor governments in creating a history curriculum which became an inherently politicised representation of the past. The focus of this thesis has been narrowed to the Australian history aspect of the

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curriculum in order to explore the centrality of the idea of the nation. While the nuts and bolts of curriculum development is usually a matter of professional expertise in the areas of pedagogy and content, in the case of the Australian history curriculum the interest was political. Those contributing to the development of the Australian national history curriculum were concerned with a range of issues which included how history should be taught, how history to contributes to nation-building, social cohesion and a sense of pride in the nation. This thesis is especially interested in the question of intervention in the curriculum, both ideologically through the contributions of conservative think-tanks and journalists, and politically, through the interventions of politicians. As an extension of this, I analyse the conservative side of the debate and their use of history to argue for the Judeo-Christian roots of Australia as a nation.

The intention in focusing on debates over the curriculum is to demonstrate the nexus at which national identity and tradition are determined and promoted by a national Australian history curriculum. History as a discourse is culturally, politically and ideologically charged and cannot be easily separated from wider social forces as it requires sensitivity to nuances of context. The heightened level of political interest in the Australian debates attracted national media coverage, often sensationalising the issue rather than providing thoughtful responses to the development of the curriculum. Also, because there had not previously been a national curriculum in any school subject, the history curriculum drew scrutiny for this novel approach.

4 See Appendix 1 for a select list of newspaper, magazine and online articles on the history curriculum from 2006. This demonstrates the political emphasis on the history curriculum.
The history wars that reignited during Howard’s Prime Ministership influenced the rhetoric and ideology of the curriculum debates. These wars were dominated by public debates ‘simplistic, divisive and overly partisan’ in origin that reduced scholarly contributions to mere polemics.\footnote{Anna Clark, ‘The History Wars’, in Anna Clark and Paul Ashton, eds., \textit{Australian History Now} (Sydney: UNSW Books, 2013), p. 152.} Howard presided over and contributed to some of the most vitriolic events in the history wars at the time.\footnote{See Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, \textit{The History Wars} (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003) for an account of the history wars and the pervasive political atmosphere which accompanied them.} He set about restoring the subject of Australian history with a curriculum devoid of ‘black arm-band’ perspectives. Howard’s proposal to rewrite the curriculum can be seen as his attempt to end the contestability of Australian identity that arose from the history wars.

The Coalition’s attempt at introducing a mandatory history curriculum had ideological underpinnings as it insisted on its own partisan account of the past. While the concerns Howard had over the state of history teaching had some basis, it was the process by which he sought to improve it that asserted the cultural authority of the curriculum. Any intention of creating a national historical narrative free from political intervention was quickly forgotten, as the battle was not only over the past, but how it informs the present. Howard perceived that a national history curriculum driven by facts and dates outlined in a chronological order provided the empirical basis for the traditional concept of the nation. Howard believed that the trend of relativist postmodern and left-leaning history teaching had resulted in Australians’ inability to feel pride in their nation. He argued that the writings of revisionist historians were eroding what he saw as ‘the Australian achievement’ which fostered social cohesion through the British inheritance of democracy and the rule of law.\footnote{Clark, ‘The History Wars’, p. 153; Howard, \textit{A sense of balance: The Australian Achievement in 2006}, <http://pmtranscripts.dpmc.gov.au/browse.php?id=22110>, viewed 6 March, 2013.}
In many regards, the curriculum is a metaphor for how the nation is represented and what knowledge is conceived to be essential for students as future citizens. Howard wanted a mandatory national history curriculum to emphasise the achievements of Australia rather than dwell on what he perceived to be negative aspects such as the past treatment of Aborigines. Howard’s Australia Day Address stressed the importance of maintaining social cohesion which he suggested could be achieved through the compulsory introduction of Australian history in schools, where all school children, no matter their ethnic background, would be versed in Australia’s past achievements; largely those of white, British Australians. He believed that celebrating ethnic diversity should not be at the ‘expense of ongoing pride ... in old Australia.’\(^8\) It was important that as citizens, Australians knew their history and could celebrate the nation’s diversity but most importantly, appreciate the values that bound the nation together. This thesis will explore the manner in which the curriculum was utilised as an ideological tool in the name of initially restoring Australians’ pride in the nation and its achievements, and then under the Labor Government as part of its wider education revolution.

The debates over the history curriculum were played out in theatres and on stages that politicians are accustomed to such as the Houses of Parliament, talkback radio and press conferences, opinion pieces published in newspapers and formal functions. As an Australian political institution, the National Press Club hosted two key events in the process of the curriculum’s development. These were Howard’s call for a renewal of history in 2006, and Tony Abbott’s pre-election speech in 2013 which renewed the history wars by suggesting an

absence of Coalition history in the Australian National History Curriculum meant that it needed to be reviewed. 9

Scholarship on curriculum issues and history education is a burgeoning field. The history wars, also described as the ‘cultural wars’ have emerged globally as nations attempt to confront their past. 10 Within the Australian discourse Dr Anna Clark, Professor Stuart Macintyre and Professor Tony Taylor have contributed to debates as historians or educationalists in academic and popular media forums. All three have been critical of the conservative arguments in the history debates. Kevin Donnelly and Greg Melleuish have been the major contributors for the right in these debates and regularly wrote opinion pieces for media outlets, the conservative journal Quadrant and the conservative think-tank, the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) rather than in academic forums. Disagreement between these leading figures is a central feature of the discourse which is strongly personality, as well as professionally, driven. For example, disputes between Melleuish, and Macintyre and Taylor have been a theme of the curriculum process. As authorities in the debate, these opposing sides of the discourse were the most consistent during this period. While other academics and historians had considerable input, these three were all commissioned by the government at some point to contribute to writing different iterations of the curriculum.

The research for this thesis involved analysing multiple source materials which reflected the diversity of forums in which the curriculum debates were conducted. This thesis has been

10 For a recent account of the global phenomena of classroom history wars see Tony Taylor and Robert Guyver, eds., History Wars and the Classroom: Global Perspectives (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012).
informed by reading a range of academic texts about Australian history to develop a conceptual framework for discussing notions of national identity and tradition. Important specific primary sources included newspaper editorials, articles, electronic media and opinion pieces which reflected public interest in the history curriculums. The significance of particular people to the development of the curriculum, such as politicians, members of conservative think-tanks and academics is reflected in their contributions to newspapers and electronic media. Several academic protagonists contributed to official curriculum documents then later wrote reflective pieces on these experiences. These reflective sources offer insights into how they perceived their role at the time and what they believed they could achieve. In comparing these personal sources with the official documents, the influence the political process had on the creation of curriculums became evident. Taylor, for example, has written about how his official contributions were reshaped once they were in the hands of the government.  

11 These sources also provide insights into how the curriculum debates consisted mostly of a small group of influential professionals and politicians.

Literature on curriculum issues provided theoretical frameworks for my discussion of events, and examples of the trends which characterised these debates. Also, primary curriculum documents were vital for understanding the specifics of the Australian history curriculum. In addition, I conducted several interviews with key figures from this period.  

The interviews illuminated the personality driven processes of this period and highlighted the differences between interviewees’ experiences and actions, and their subsequent


12 See Bibliography for details about interviewees.
reflections. The interview, which can be conceptualised as oral history, is an important source for ‘historians of the present’ or recent past. Interviews with key protagonists were crucial to understanding nuances that had not yet been expressed in written sources. As historical production extends beyond the ‘limits of academic history-writing’ the use of oral histories also provides evidence of the ways in which historical knowledge is constructed by both oral and written forms. My aim in interviewing was driven by ‘the passion for the personal story’ in seeking to uncover the ‘speakers’ relationship to their history. Oral history has the potential to complicate an understanding of what happened as it may be contradictory to written documents. This demonstrates the contestability of events, and in this context, the curriculum debates. Certain events were clarified during the interviews which expanded on my understanding of written accounts.

This thesis argues that the history curriculum is not just based on pedagogical or historiographical concerns but has become an ideological tool for political interests. While previous scholarship has investigated similar arguments about the curriculum, this thesis has taken a distinctive approach in the way it has synthesised a number of core concepts. These include framing the curriculum through the concept of the nation, the curriculum as cultural authority, the cultural canon and the conservative rhetoric of British heritage, Judeo-Christian ethics and western civilisation.

II

16 Hamilton and Slopes, Oral History and Popular Memory, p. 3.
The thesis is composed of three chapters. The first chapter explores the attempt by the Howard Government to create a national history curriculum. The aim is to explore the impetus behind the overtly political rationale for curriculum overhaul as exemplified by John Howard’s Australia Day Address. The events of 2006-2007 are the focus of the chapter which will introduce the early protagonists and examine how they influenced the curriculum development process under Howard. It will look at how they juggled their expert views with the demands of politicians, especially Howard’s call to remove the emphasis on thematic history and, instead, concentrate on narrative, events and facts. This chapter considers the Howard Government’s approach to how history should be taught and what underlined his approach.

The second chapter discusses the development of the national history curriculum under the Labor government which was carried out by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). This chapter examines the representation of the idea of the nation in the curriculum which includes considering the differing emphases placed on a more traditional notion of the nation, one that was civic-inspired and emphasised common purposes, or one that represents Australia’s cultural diversity with an emphasis on different ethnic histories. The cross-curriculum priorities as a feature of the ACARA curriculum, and how their contributions widen the conceptualisation of the nation, is covered in some depth. The question of whether the idea of the nation is, in fact, the most appropriate analytical tool for teaching history and developing historical consciousness is considered. The chapter also discusses the notion of the cultural canon as a conceptual framework. A final strand of analysis regards critiques of ACARA by politicians and the attempts by Labor
to depoliticise the development of the curriculum, although conservatives continued to critique the process as highly politicised.

The third chapter is set within the context of the final phase of the national history curriculum debates.\textsuperscript{17} It explores the ongoing conservative debates in response to the ACARA curriculum and their embrace of British heritage, Judeo-Christian ethics and western civilisation as the underpinning of Australia’s historical development. The focus on these three concepts is to untangle what David Cannadine refers to as the ‘impulse ... to surrender all the peoples of the world into belligerent collectivities.’\textsuperscript{18} Cannadine’s statement is reflective of conservative arguments that propose a common identity which ignores the importance of heterogeneity. Exploring the importance of history to national identity will also illustrate how the curriculum has become as a key battleground for the triumph of conservatism. While Rudd and Labor declared that they sought to end the cultural wars, conservatives have remained antagonistic. Whilst academics and educationalists were the key protagonists in chapter two, the third chapter will emphasise the role of the ideological rhetoric of post-Howard conservatives. The chapter will further explore how history has been used for political gain as the cultural wars appear set to be reignited once again.

\textsuperscript{17} See Epilogue. At the time of writing the Coalition Government announced they would review the national history curriculum.

\textsuperscript{18} David Cannadine, \textit{The Undivided Past} (London: Allen Lane, 2013), p. 5.
Chapter One: The History Curriculum Political Football

In 2006, the teaching of Australian history in schools varied across the nation due to education being under the jurisdiction of State and Territory governments rather than the Commonwealth. For instance, unlike other states, New South Wales made history a mandatory stand alone component of the school curriculum. The discrepancies between States and Territories in their allocation of time to the subject suggested that a national approach would benefit students. When John Howard proclaimed that Australian history teaching was in a state of national disrepair and needed a ‘root and branch renewal,’ the opportunity to rewrite the nation’s past proved too enticing for politicians to leave it to curriculum experts.\(^\text{19}\) In the context of the history wars, the story of how the national history curriculum was developed illustrates the incendiary nature of history curriculums and how political intervention for ideological purposes could compromise the process of change. While previous debates about teaching history were in relation to interpretations of the past, the arguments had moved to interpretations of how history should be taught. This chapter focuses on the Coalition’s political influences over which histories should be taught and how they should be taught.

Howard wanted the ‘Australian achievement’ to be celebrated in the curriculum, arguing that a drastic change in history teaching was necessary to reverse this trend.\(^\text{20}\) In his Australia Day address Howard stated,


‘Too often history has fallen victim in an ever more crowded curriculum to subjects deemed more ‘relevant’ to today. Too often, it is taught without any sense of structured narrative, replaced by a fragmented stew of ‘themes’ and ‘issues’. And too often, history, along with other subjects in the humanities, has succumbed to a postmodern culture of relativism where any objective record of achievement is questioned or repudiated ... It is impossible, for example, to understand the history of this country without an understanding of the evolution of parliamentary democracy or the ideas that galvanised the Enlightenment.’21

For Howard, the overhaul of the history curriculum would nullify postmodern relativism and make ‘the Australian achievement’ its centrepiece. Howard’s concern over the teaching of history was indicative of the importance of history to national identity. He perceived that a relativist approach to western civilization in history curriculums could lead to a society without cohesion or understanding of a common heritage.

In his Australia Day address Howard acknowledged that in the aftermath of the Cronulla riots, which had occurred just a month prior, questions over the social cohesion of the nation had been raised. In framing the need for social cohesion, Howard was seen to be attempting to fuse history with patriotism and affirm a commitment to ensuring the ‘coherence, strength, and identity’ of the nation.22 As he believed in the traditional concept of the nation, Howard was on a quest to end the ‘frantic and consistent search for a new or

different identity.’\textsuperscript{23} The 2006 address was a statement on the connection between ‘political leadership, language and the judgement of history’ specifically deriding ‘cultural dieticians’ peddling black arm-band histories which ‘pervasively distorted ... the facts of history.’\textsuperscript{24} The Australia Day Address was met with general agreement over the need for a national Australian history curriculum, yet there was scepticism over how this would eventuate. In his address Howard had ‘advocated a single story, Whigish in character, as the core of the Australian saga’ and had wanted this story to be taught to Australian school students.\textsuperscript{25}

This chapter will explore how opposing interpretations of the teaching of history shaped the curriculum which Howard released in late 2007. History provides an ‘imaginative and sympathetic insight’ into what the nation is, and Howard had sensed the curriculum would be the document to communicate that insight.\textsuperscript{26} However, first he had to succeed in presenting a national approach to Australian history as the resolution of a root and branch renewal.

I

Two key events mark a nexus of political and pedagogical investment into the teaching of Australian history nationally. The first was the 1988 Australian Bicentenary and the second was the 1989 Hobart Declaration which was affirmed by the 1999 Adelaide Declaration. The Bicentenary was a defining moment for establishing a new critique of the place of Aborigines in the British colonisation of Australia and the Declarations were significant for

\textsuperscript{23} Anna Clark, “Politicians Using History”, \textit{Australian Journal of Politics and History} 56, no. 1, (March 2010), p. 120.


\textsuperscript{25} Hamilton and Ashton, \textit{History at the Crossroads}, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{26} Graeme Davidson, \textit{The Use and Abuse of Australian History} (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2000), p. 263.
bringing together the States and Territories in delivering joint national statements on
Australian schooling. The Australian Bicentenary sharpened the focus of inquiry into what
the nation was and who it represented. It has been described as the opening scene in the
theatre of the history wars.  

The Director of the Australian Bicentennial Authority saw the
Australia Day activities on Sydney Harbour as an opportunity to forge ‘a national identity.’

However, such a British-centred focus at a time when the place of Aborigines in the teaching
of Australian history had become a ‘central issue’ was contentious.

In January 1988, the
Federal Labor Government’s Education Minister, John Dawkins, had met with State and
Territory counterparts to discuss the place of Aboriginal history in history curriculums.

Dawkins saw it was the ‘responsibility of the history profession’ to present the past in an
‘accurate and positive way,’ but he recognised that government would also need to play a
role in implementing any changes.

The Bicentenary generated discussion on the state of history teaching nationally and the
potential for creating a national history curriculum. The following year, in the Hobart
Declaration of 1989, State Education Ministers committed to the ‘National Collaboration in
Curriculum Development’ in recognition of the need to improve all curriculums nationally,
not just history.

The main legacy of the Hobart Declaration, in terms of the history
curriculum was the consolidation of humanities, including history, within the subject

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27 Anna Clark, History’s Children (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008), p. 3; Anna Clark, ‘The History Wars’, in Anna
28 Anna Clark, Teaching the Nation: Politics and Pedagogy in Australian History (Melbourne: Melbourne
University Press, 2004), p. 27.
29 Anna Clark, Teaching the Nation, p. 27.
30 Henry Reynolds, Why Weren’t We Told? A Personal Search for the Truth About Our History (Ringwood,
31 Clark, Teaching the Nation, pp. 120-122.
'Studies of Society and Environment' (SOSE). This meant that history was subsumed into a large ‘general knowledge’ subject, which was part of Howard’s critique of the low standard to which history had fallen. In NSW, SOSE was known as History, Science and Its Environment (HSIE), although there was a separate Australian history syllabus for years nine and ten. Howard believed that the subject of civics was best taught within history, as it was in NSW, and its importance had been lost within the SOSE model. The NSW premier Bob Carr, known as the history premier, had ensured Australian history would not be totally consumed by HSIE and it was this template which Howard sought to emulate. By 2006, the ‘disappointing failure’ of SOSE had been identified by Federal Government reports yet solutions had been ignored.

One of these government reports was the 2000 National Inquiry into School History authored by Tony Taylor which highlighted the need for renewal in history teaching. The chair of the inquiry, Stuart Macintyre, Professor of History at Melbourne University, claimed difficulties had arisen in history teaching when politicians believed in a single established narrative of Australian history. He further suggested that if the Prime Minister had serious intentions of raising the standards of history teaching, the indicators of falling national standards would not have been ignored. It seems that Howard’s decision to renew history teaching was ultimately politically driven in that he was influenced by the issues of social

33 Taylor, ‘Under Siege from Left and Right’, p. 32.
37 Michele Grattan, Howard Claims victory in national cultural wars, The Age, 26/01/2006.
38 Michele Grattan, Howard Claims victory in national cultural wars, The Age, 26/01/2006; Taylor, ‘Under Siege from Left and Right’, p. 32.
cohesion prompted by the Cronulla riots, rather than the national inquiry into history teaching.

Howard’s plan for reviving the teaching of history was interpreted as a politician doing history. Howard’s speechwriter John Kunkel suggested the Prime Minister had tapped into a sense of ‘national self-confidence’ being eroded by black arm-band views of the past and therefore was reflecting the will of the people.39 Although Howard had rejected the view that leaders shape national identity, he was projecting ‘his own concept of the nation,’ disregarding that he previously railed against the Keating government’s attempt to ‘rewrite Australian history.’40 Howard had made it clear that the history which he envisaged would be objective, fact-driven and set out in a chronological narrative that would protect ‘Australian schoolchildren from historical bias and subjectivity.’41 In response to Howard’s vision, Stuart Macintyre commented that a revision of the history curriculum needed to be ‘open to diverse viewpoints and that it is not simply an exercise in indoctrination.’42 Labor’s Education Spokesperson, Jenny Macklin, suggested that Howard had not consulted either the Federal Education department or its minister before his Australia Day Address.43 The initial concern that history teaching needed to be improved would soon develop into questions of what was regarded as mandatory to the teaching of Australian history. Which perspectives of history were to be taught would become a vexed question during the Howard government’s attempts to create a national Australian history curriculum.

II

40 Curran, The Power of Speech, p. xiii; Davidson, Use and Abuse, p. 5.
41 Clark, ‘Teaching the nation’s story’, p. 6.
The Australia Day Address set the scene for curriculum change at a national level but without stated aims or objectives of how the curriculum would be renewed. In fact, Greg Melleuish suggests that at ‘no stage was any sort of coherent strategy or game plan created.’ Early attempts to renew Australian history in schools were quickly politicised with the involvement of the Liberal Party think-tank, the Menzies Research Centre (MRC). The roundtable discussions initiated by the MRC gained momentum in the development of a model curriculum but the process needed to be completed by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). The recently appointed Education Minister, Julie Bishop, took over from the MRC in mid-2006 and announced that the Coalition’s plan for renewal would revolve around a one day history summit to be convened later in the year. The History Summit, as it came to be known, was held on 17 August, 2006 and included ‘some leading Australian historians, public figures who promote the study of history, and educational leaders.’ The twenty three summiteers were referred to as representing the ‘sensible centre’ by Bishop to avoid criticism of the summit being a partisan project. However, the ‘sensible centre’ included invitations to controversial conservative Geoffrey Blainey and left leaning Stuart Macintyre which suggested the term was political ‘spin.’

49 Greg Melleuish, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower (Sydney, 26 July, 2013), (in author’s possession).
Discussion at the Summit was guided by two main papers. One of these provided an outline of how history was being taught across the country and the other was a template of the Government’s proposed curriculum. The Summit’s objectives were to oversee a ‘renaissance in the teaching of Australian history’ and to explore ways of strengthening the subject, however this would prove far too ambitious for a one day event.\textsuperscript{50} While the rhetoric of a renaissance was welcomed, there was trepidation among those in attendance about whether the proposed rote learning based curriculum was the most appropriate means by which to achieve this aim. Also, the absence of history teachers at the Summit suggested a lack of consultation and actual consideration for the classroom.\textsuperscript{51} By attending the summit, professionals within history and education displayed willingness to participate in a process designed to improve the state of Australian history in schools. Having politicians dictate the proceedings was not necessarily a disincentive but overt ideological attempts at crafting the curriculum was not deemed acceptable.

The Summit proved to be a disappointment in the quest to bring about a renaissance of Australian history teaching following Howard’s strong rhetoric in the Australia Day Address. One of the two papers written for discussion at the summit was \textit{An overview of the teaching and learning of Australian history in schools} by Tony Taylor and Anna Clark of Monash University. This paper was similar to Taylor’s 2000 Report into History Teaching and provided an extensive survey of history teaching nationally at the time that illustrated inconsistencies across States and Territories and how far the subject had fallen in academic


standards. Taylor is a key protagonist during this period who contributed to both the Howard and Labor processes of curriculum creation. Clark contributed to the Taylor’s Summit paper in her capacity as his research assistant. She had previously written a chapter in Stuart Macintyre’s The History Wars in 2003 and was completing her PhD on the politics and pedagogy of history teaching at the time of the summit.

The second paper written by Greg Melleuish titled The teaching of Australian history in Australian schools: a normative view proposed that while Australian history needed to be taught in a global or international framework, it had to be done within a strong national narrative. Although Melleuish’s paper was to be ‘an indicative set of suggestions for what could be taught’ he claims it was ‘attacked’ for not being teachable. The critique of the paper by many of the summiteers was symbolic of their distrust in Howard and Bishop’s intentions. Taylor, who was wary about Melleuish’s selection, argued that the decision to recruit Melleuish ‘in the first serious attempt by any Australian government to push through a national curriculum’ would appeal to conservatives yet avoid appearing as a partisan choice. Melleuish had proclaimed surprise at being chosen by Howard suggesting that approaching him was an ‘obscure’ choice which showed the lack of ‘sensible’ candidates for

52 The full findings of the report can be found in Tony Taylor with Anna Clark, An overview of the teaching and learning of Australian history in schools: Prepared for the Australian History Summit Canberra, August 17th 2006 (Department of Education, Science and Training: Canberra, 2006).
the role.\textsuperscript{57} Howard referred to Melleuish in the Australia Day Address and from that point on he was thrust into the curriculum debate. Melleuish’s contribution to this debate since 2007, despite having conservative leanings, was been critical of Howard’s approach, as well as Labor’s commissioning of Taylor and Macintyre to write the ACARA curriculum.

The absence of the Education Minister Julie Bishop for much of the day at the Summit was also notable. During the opening address, Bishop had claimed students ‘should be given a good grounding in key dates, facts and events’ of Australian history, although both Melleuish and Taylor claim her absence suggested she was not committed to the endeavour.\textsuperscript{58} The objectives of the Summit could not be realised when it was evident that the summiteers saw Melleuish’s paper as unteachable for being ‘too deep and too broad’ and problematic in ‘translating it into classroom reality.’\textsuperscript{59} Summiteers and commentators suggested that Howard and Bishop thought they had the ‘moral weight’ and ‘political clout’ to enact their plan without contention.\textsuperscript{60} When the agenda to ‘rubber stamp’ Melleuish’s ‘fact based narrative’ failed, there was no ‘fall-back position’ as Howard and Bishop had been ‘confident’ in the objective of the day.\textsuperscript{61} The Government had intended the Summit would produce a bi-partisan solution to renewing the history curriculum. However, a root and branch renewal was not achievable in just one day.


\textsuperscript{60} Clark, \textit{History’s Children}, p. 95.

The failure of the Summit to achieve its objectives can be explained in part by both the large number of those in attendance and the short period in which it was planned. Melleuish described the strategy of the summit as akin to the spirit of a ‘boy’s own adventure.’ He claimed the Coalition had failed to grasp the difficulties of the creation of an entirely new curriculum and the lack of planning for the event was apparent. Although Bishop was the public face of the Summit, it was Howard and Kunkel who predominantly drove the process. Both wanted Australians to ‘feel comfortable about their history’ and Howard perceived that Kunkel understood the ‘ebb and flow of cultural debate.’ During the Summit it became evident that the Prime Minister desired a particular outcome. Melleuish suggests that caucusing among summiteers to discredit his curriculum was ‘designed to embarrass the government of the day’ which took precedence over drafting a curriculum. As Melleuish’s paper was rejected by the summiteers midway through the day, there was a realisation that the Summit needed to produce some outcomes. This involved re-setting the agenda by drafting a curriculum that would be ‘teachable, doable and sustainable’ as well as ‘manageable, effective and inspirational for teachers.’ The summiteers produced a hastily prepared ‘draft communiqué’ composed of ‘key questions with key chronological events’ in Australian history.

The Summit collapsed in large part because it was trying to find a political solution to a professional problem. However, this did not stop *The Australian* from running a gushing review of the Summit in their weekend edition. It appeared as though ‘the editorial team had planned for a Howard/Melleuish victory’ with a two page feature of Melleuish’s ‘draft syllabus.’

Richard Allsop from the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) was one of only a few who commended the outcomes of the summit although his article recognised Howard for undertaking the process rather than for the summit itself. Following the summit the debate over the history curriculum was it was no longer confined to academia. This marked the progression into a popular and political phase of debate. In October, 2006 Bishop stated that she remained committed to a national curriculum to end the monopoly of ‘left-wing ideologues in state governments’ who ‘hijacked what is being taught in schools.’ John Howard was also not deterred by the Summit’s failure and continued his pledge to renew the teaching of history. At Quadrant’s 50th anniversary dinner in October 2006, Howard stated that ‘armed with clear evidence of the decline of Australian history in our schools, the Government has made a start in our quest to ensure children are actually taught their national inheritance.’

Howard seemed to perceive historians as politically biased and likely to indoctrinate students and that politicians had a responsibility to intervene. He did not seem willing to concede that his government’s actions were equally indoctrinating.

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73 Bonnell and Crotty, “Australia’s history under Howard”, p. 162.
A working party created in the ashes of the History Summit appointed Tony Taylor to write a curriculum based on guidelines established by the summiteers. The working party consisted of six summiteers and DEST secretary Lisa Paul as chair who would spend one day together in October 2006 ‘developing the Milestones and Questions’ as the guide for the curriculum. Tony Taylor then took the ‘Milestones and Questions’ around the country for consultation with teachers, curriculum officials and historians with the aim of presenting a finalised document in early 2007.

The commissioning of Taylor as sole author reflected Howard’s propensity for single author curriculums. Although the curriculum development was to be consultative, ultimately it was the work of Taylor. During the process Taylor found that his efforts became compromised with the Prime Minister’s office ‘pressuring’ him to include ‘more facts’ in the draft curriculum. The resulting document titled Outline of a Model Curriculum Framework: Australian History Years 3-10 was approved by DEST and passed on to the Prime Minister’s office. The aim of Taylor’s document was to ‘contribute to the development of a model curriculum in Australian history’ and ‘introduce students to topics in Australian history’ by helping them ‘to have a thorough narrative understanding of Australian history.’ The curriculum was framed contextually around ‘locality/community,’ and when appropriate, ‘national/international’ with ‘strong links to the national.’ However Taylor’s ‘milestones

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74 Taylor, “Losing the Plot”, p. 15.
79 Taylor, “Outline Model Curriculum”, p. 11.2
and questions’ approach failed to satisfy Howard who still insisted on a fact and date based account of history.

The announcement of a reference panel to review the curriculum when it had already been accepted by DEST signalled that Howard was dissatisfied with Taylor’s curriculum. At this time, Taylor’s official role in developing the history curriculum under Howard ended. The four person reference panel was to be convened for a one day meeting to assess the document. The invited panel members were historians Nick Brown and Geoffrey Blainey, social commentator Gerard Henderson, and NSW Board of Studies history inspector Jennifer Lawless. The announcement of the reference panel was ‘attacked as an example of the Federal Government imposing its ideological bent on schoolchildren.’ Taylor had embraced multiple perspectives of history encouraging students to answer the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the nation’s development through questions. In contrast, Howard was in favour of a clear and precise narrative of the milestone events that shaped Australia. Taylor’s curriculum was described as ‘Too ambiguous. [with] Too much debate....[and] Too much thinking’ as Howard wanted ‘the dragnet version of history.’

The creation of the reference panel was the most politicised moment in the process of developing the curriculum under Howard’s watch, further illustrating his ideological intentions in addressing the teaching of history. The aim of the panel was to review and comment on Taylor’s curriculum. In the construction of the panel it appeared the four

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81 Tony Taylor, Personal Correspondence, (September, 2013, (in author’s possession).
members had been given separate briefs on the objectives of the one day meeting.\(^{84}\) Although the panel was described as a ‘more tightly controlled mini-Summit’ and well intentioned, a lack of common direction limited its effectiveness.\(^{85}\) A theme had emerged of rushed one-day events that pushed for quick solutions to bring about Howard’s renaissance of history teaching. The root and branch renewal that Howard announced for history resembled more of a review than overhaul.

When the members of the reference panel were announced there were concerns that its findings would be influenced by a perceived conservative bias.\(^{86}\) Henderson was a former speechwriter for Howard, and Blainey was known for his right-wing sympathies. The choice of two conservatives on a panel of four coupled with Bishop not being a ‘consultative Federal Minister’ led to NSW Education Minister John Della Bosca barring Lawless from participating.\(^{87}\) Della Bosca perceived the NSW history curriculum to already be superior to one that Howard could offer and found the reference panel to be ‘ideologically repugnant’ and a political stunt.\(^{88}\) Della Bosca explained his decision to remove Lawless from the panel, as ‘for all her skill as a public servant’ it would have been particularly difficult to take a stand against ‘two professional hard men who knew how to run a case.’\(^{89}\) In an openly public political disagreement, he opposed implementing an inferior history curriculum that would be ‘eight years behind the times.’\(^{90}\) He also opposed having one of his bureaucrats compromised by what the panel would produce. The *Sydney Morning Herald* ran an editorial describing Della Bosca as treating the curriculum like ‘a political football’ although

\(^{84}\) Nick Brown, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower (Sydney, 15 July, 2013, (in author’s possession).
\(^{85}\) Taylor, “Losing the Plot”, p. 16.
\(^{87}\) John Della Bosca, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower (Sydney, 23 July, 2013, (in author’s possession).
\(^{89}\) John Della Bosca, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower (Sydney, 23 July, 2013, (in author’s possession).
critics argued both sides were treating the curriculum politically.\(^91\) This situation marked the first public State and Federal disagreement over the curriculum while also illustrating the ideological intent in curriculum development. In reflecting on the creation of the panel, Jenny Lawless pointed out the need to be ‘always be wary of what comes out of a political construction of a thing like that.’\(^92\)

The selection of Blainey and Henderson due to their connections to the Prime Minister was not surprising. The fourth member of the panel was Nick Brown who stated that he was unclear about why he was selected for the panel. He said he had ‘a suspicion that my association with the development of the online version of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, as a possible teaching resource, might have had something to do with my inclusion.’\(^93\) Brown as an ‘anodyne’ appointment was perceived as balancing the panel.\(^94\) NSW private school Principal Elizabeth Ward replaced Jennifer Lawless. The panel met once and according to Brown it was ‘made clear a fairly quick outcome would be appreciated.’\(^95\) The panel’s role was essentially to provide advice on the Taylor curriculum. There was agreement between panel members that Taylor’s curriculum emphasised ‘iconic moments of nationalism’ however it was considered to be too conceptually narrow and needed a reflective historical dimension.\(^96\) Brown recalls: ‘the basic point, was that our work should not be onerous, and should essentially focus on commentary on the report with a focus on its suitability, inclusiveness, omissions, practicality etcetera.’\(^97\) However, he pointed out that...

\(^92\) Jenny Lawless, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower (Sydney, 16 July, 2013, (in author’s possession).
\(^93\) Nick Brown, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower (Sydney, 15 July, 2013, (in author’s possession).
\(^94\) Nick Brown, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower (Sydney, 15 July, 2013, (in author’s possession).
\(^95\) Nick Brown, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower (Sydney, 15 July, 2013, (in author’s possession).
\(^97\) Nick Brown, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower (Sydney, 15 July, 2013, (in author’s possession).
they ‘had been provided with no real common framework’ within which to operate. Brown comments that the panel were not made aware that their day’s work and subsequent emails and phone calls would form the basis of the next curriculum.

The curriculum which was developed in the aftermath of the reference panel and guided by DEST was titled a Guide to Teaching Australian History in Years 9 and 10, and released in October 2007. Brown critiqued it as ‘completely unwieldy in its scale to fit neatly into a school timetable or be served by available resources.’ He adds that it had not been made clear that the report would be made public, even less so with Howard’s ‘imprimatur.’ The draft guide provided three reasons for students to learn Australian history. These were ‘to enquire into ... and evaluate the development of the nation in which they live’, ‘development and understanding of Australia within a global context’ and to foster ‘a lifelong interest in Australian history.’ The guide was structured according to topics which each included milestone events and significant people. For example, within the topic ‘Emerging nation 1851-1900’ the milestone events included the 1850s gold rush, self government from 1856, the Depression of the 1890s and the 1872 ‘introduction of free, secular and compulsory education’ in Victoria. The curriculum was reduced from Taylor’s original document which covered most of the primary and high school years, to being only for years nine and ten and had a strong resemblance to the NSW model. To ensure that

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104 Department of Education, Science and Training, Guide to the teaching of Australian history in years 9 and 10, p. 11.
States would adopt the new model of history teaching and make it binding, Howard announced that school funding was contingent on the adoption of the curriculum.  

III

Howard’s call for renewing history teaching was in part a reaction against the influence of the history wars on pedagogy and his attempt to reverse the post-modernist tendencies that he perceived to be permeating history teaching. By the mid-2000s the state of history as a subject was in disrepair with only symbolic efforts made to address the issue. Howard’s attempt at the overhaul of history was through the mediums of the History Summit and Reference Panel. During both these processes, it was apparent that historians and educationalists would not accept a single narrative or particular view of the nation as the understanding of diversity and contrasting views in Australian history was fundamental. In Chapter Two the conception of the nation is explored in depth looking at the national history curriculum developed by Labor and its cross-curriculum priorities. Further, this will involve discussing the complexities of civic and ethnic identities and the limitations of the nation for understanding a heterogeneous history.

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Chapter Two: Labor’s Turn

This chapter discusses the Labor government’s national history curriculum as developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Following the 2007 election, Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd employed rhetoric to depoliticise the history curriculum. In the ACARA curriculum a global and Indigenous emphasis on Australian history was seen to present a particular account of the nation. The inclusion of Aboriginal and Asian perspectives within the discourse of the nation was central to the ACARA framework, and incorporated to a far greater extent than in existing State history curriculums. Conservatives argued that this inclusion challenged the primary role of British heritage in the shaping of the Australian nation. More specifically, there evolved the question of how the idea of the nation should be conceptualised in the new curriculum: a civic nation, in which history emphasises the civic development of Australia; or, an ethnic nation, in which history emphasises cultural and ethnic diversity. Of course, a civic nation could include the idea of ethnic diversity but, as conceived by conservatives, these two concepts were in conflict. They preferred the idea of the civic nation as the way to explore the Australian achievement. That the curriculum was being used as an ideological tool was made evident through the ACARA curriculum process. This chapter will explore and discuss the ACARA curriculum as a document of cultural authority, and the political battle to gain control over it.

Education had been a key feature of the 2007 election with Labor campaigning on the promise of delivering an education revolution. This was to be realised in a complete renewal of the curriculum, restructured school funding and public reporting on school standards. ACARA, initially known as the National Curriculum Board (NCB) until early 2009, was an
independent government organisation established by the Labor Government to create, implement and assess curriculums.\textsuperscript{106} NCB became ACARA in early 2009 after a series of national forums to gain advice on developing the curriculums.\textsuperscript{107} The entire process of conceptualising, writing, drafting, consulting and implementing the new school curriculums fell within the remit of ACARA. A noticeable feature of Labor’s commitment to its education revolution was writing ACARA into Federal Parliamentary Law.\textsuperscript{108} Known as the ACARA Act, this gave ACARA the authority to ‘develop and administer a national school curriculum.’\textsuperscript{109} The December 2008 \textit{Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians} had committed the State, Territory and Commonwealth governments to ensuring ‘a world class’ national curriculum.\textsuperscript{110} The goals of the declaration were to ‘promote equity and excellence’, and ensure that all Australians ‘become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.’\textsuperscript{111} The Melbourne Declaration in tandem with the ACARA Act was the pedagogical and policy basis of Labor’s education revolution. Following the Declaration, ACARA began the task of creating a national curriculum comprising of four core subjects: English, History, Mathematics and Science.

The development of the ACARA curriculums was designed to be a consultative process. Both framing and shaping papers were to be released before a round of consultations which would inform the final documents. In November 2008, the framing papers for each of the


core subjects were released. ACARA stated that the ‘purpose of the consultation was to obtain feedback from stakeholders that would inform the rewriting of the shaping papers as foundational documents for writing the national curriculum.’\(^\text{112}\) The curriculum writers were appointed by the ACARA board in the form of an advisory group chaired by Stuart Macintyre who was the lead writer for the history curriculum.\(^\text{113}\) The Board was appointed by the Federal government with representatives from all State and Territories as well as representatives from the Independent and Catholic school sectors. The plans for how the history curriculum was to take shape drew on research conducted by Anna Clark and Tony Taylor which included the curriculum Taylor prepared for the History Summit in 2006.\(^\text{114}\)

A significant distinguishing feature of the ACARA curriculum model was the inclusion of three cross-curriculum priorities, embedded within all the curriculums. These were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia, and Sustainability.\(^\text{115}\) The purpose of these priorities is to ensure the curriculum is ‘both relevant to the lives of students and addresses the contemporary issues they face’ so that they can ‘engage effectively with and prosper in a globalised world.’\(^\text{116}\) The cross-curriculum priorities allow students to develop an understanding of the past that is enriched


by multiple perspectives. By embedding the cross-curriculum priorities within all the core subject curriculums, students are made aware of the heterogeneity of the nation. This aim was commended for ‘getting away from the nationalism which can often distort the story’ and emphasising that Australian history existed before 1788.\textsuperscript{117} While the Coalition claimed that this approach was at the expense of Australia’s British heritage, Labor defended the cross-curriculum priorities for presenting the nation as ‘neither black armband nor white blindfold.’\textsuperscript{118} The representation of Australian history through this framing was regarded as challenging the concept of the nation as a distinctly British creation.

While Howard had embarked on a political process to create an Australian history curriculum, Labor claimed to pursue a pedagogical process. Kevin Rudd sought to depoliticise the history curriculum and called for a ‘truce’ to end the vitriolic history and cultural wars stating it was ‘time to leave behind us the polarisation that began to infect every discussion of our nation’s past.’\textsuperscript{119} He further stated ‘in a liberal democratic society, we can agree that events happened, while we agree to differ in how we interpret them.’\textsuperscript{120} Whilst his rhetoric indicated an intention to move beyond the Howard paradigm of politicisation of history, Rudd’s appointment of left-leaning historian Stuart Macintyre as the lead writer of the history curriculum could be seen to contradict this rhetoric. Greg Melleuish argued that it was ‘incumbent on whatever government it was, particularly in history, to try to depoliticise the process and Professor Macintyre’s appointment won’t

\textsuperscript{117} Jessica Mahar, Could do better: the verdict on curriculum, Sydney Morning Herald, 8/3/2010.
\textsuperscript{118} Jessica Mahar, Could do better: the verdict on curriculum, Sydney Morning Herald, 8/3/2010.
\textsuperscript{120} Michele Grattan, Rudd urges end to history wars, The Age, 28/08/2009.
Although Macintyre dismissed criticisms that he was a polemicist intent on ‘indoctrinating’ students with left-wing histories, his involvement in the ACARA curriculum was continually referred to by the Coalition as evidence of Labor’s ideological intent.

When they were designing the national history curriculum, the Coalition wanted an academic historian who was favourable to their ideological position and who would not appear to be an overly partisan choice. Labor likewise sought an academic historian who would write a curriculum they could endorse. Consequently in the Coalition commissioning Melleuish and the Labor Government appointing Macintyre, both parties were vulnerable to criticism that they were using the history curriculum as an ideological tool. Tony Taylor, who was also perceived to represent Labor’s intent, became involved in the writing of the history curriculum under ACARA. However, because he had been commissioned by Howard previously, his appointment was not as controversial as Macintyre’s. There were a number of critiques in response to the announcement that Macintyre would be lead history curriculum writer. For instance, Melleuish claimed Macintyre’s past membership of the communist party was evidence his biases would ‘write religion’ out of Australian history and reflected the dangers in political appointments. Although the ACARA process involved several iterations of consultation and drafting with many stakeholders involvement, detractors continually highlighted the extent of Macintyre’s influence.

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The ACARA curriculum takes a global history approach to the teaching of Australian history. The rationale of this method is that understanding ‘world history enhances students’ appreciation of Australian history ... [and] the past and present experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their identity and the continuing value of their culture.’ This knowledge is argued to be essential for ‘informed and active participation in Australia’s diverse society.’ While this approach aims to develop historical understanding, a global history framework and emphasis on Aboriginal and Asian perspectives of Australian history challenges traditional concepts of the nation.

Following the rounds of consultation, ACARA released the four draft core subject curriculums, in March 2010, for feedback before producing the final documents. The Australian history curriculum gained the most attention and criticism which highlighted the politicisation of history in contrast to the other subjects. The curriculum was criticised both for the process of its development and its ideological bias. Macintyre and Melleuish agreed that the volume of competing interests had impacted the effectiveness of the process and the potential of the history curriculum. Melleuish contends that ACARA had ‘become the plaything of a whole range of lobby groups’ and subsequently that Macintyre could not be ‘blamed ... for the actual curriculum.’ As a result of the level of interference, Melleuish concluded ‘that a national curriculum was probably a big mistake.’ The history curriculum attracted a range of responses suggesting the public importance of the ACARA curriculum.

These included acute political criticism from the conservative side of politics, and widespread commentary and scrutiny by experts such as the National History Teachers Association and opinion piece writers. Conservative columnist, Miranda Devine criticised what she perceived as the removal of any references from our history ‘to the role Christianity’ played in the formation of the nation. This stemmed largely from the removal of the terminology of AD and BC in favour of CE and BCE which were already commonly accepted terms in many educational settings.

Macintyre was also critical of the ACARA writing process as he felt the draft curriculum had been compromised by Australian history being separated from global history without explanation. Although Macintyre was the lead writer, he had to integrate feedback from the advisory group, other curriculum writers and the ACARA board. Also, the chief curriculum writers found that arbitrary decisions over how teaching hours were allocated to history increasingly complicated attempts to write the curriculum and as a result the draft curriculum was critiqued for being ambitious in attempting to cover too much content. Taylor suggests that as ACARA were starting from scratch, it was inevitable that there would be teething problems.

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The creation of a national history curriculum raises questions over whether it reinforces or challenges the concept of the nation. The conceptual framework of the nation which explores the ‘symbiotic relationship’ between history and nation states is a means to explain historical discourses.\textsuperscript{132} The nation is considered historically as the primary analytical tool for investigating the past, in part because the discipline of history developed at the time that nation states became political entities.\textsuperscript{133} History teaching need not perpetuate the nation as the key analytical framework although as nations are ‘constituted by a form of popular consciousness’ education is an important facet in creating the consciousness of the nation.\textsuperscript{134} Further, the nation is ‘constituted by a relatively large grouping of people who conceive of themselves to have a communal past’ and history provides the understanding of the past.\textsuperscript{135} As Tony Ballantyne argues, the importance of the nation in history resides in the fact that teachers ‘frame their classroom narratives and arguments around the nation’ so that it is reaffirmed at every ‘significant stage in the training and professionalism of historians.’\textsuperscript{136} In the initial rationale for including history as a core subject, the NCB stated that ‘awareness of history is an essential characteristic of any civilized society; historical knowledge is fundamental to understanding ourselves and others.’\textsuperscript{137} The concept of the nation however is emphasised by the NCB claim that ‘a good understanding of Australian

\textsuperscript{135} MacCormick, ‘Nations and Nationalism’, p. 191.
\textsuperscript{136} Ballantyne, ‘Putting the nation in its place’, p. 23-24.
history is essential to civics and citizenship education.\textsuperscript{138} While an understanding of global history is important in developing historical consciousness, the nation is a point of reference for students. ACARA reiterated at each stage of the curriculum’s development that Australian history should be understood within a global framework as this provides a greater understanding of national history. The incorporation of cross-curriculum priorities to enrich Australian history was perceived by conservatives as challenging the traditional concept of the nation.

III

The concept of the cultural canon can be applied to analyse the conservative’s anxiety and criticism surrounding the responses to the ACARA Australian history curriculum and how it was seen to challenge national identity. The canon relates to the ideas, literature, music and arts which have been accepted by scholars as the most important influences in shaping western civilization.\textsuperscript{139} It is fluid, yet the canon’s institutionalisation in education tends to create a fixed idea of what constitutes it. The formation of the canon is not ‘an obvious product of ideology’ yet it can be used as a tool of ideology.\textsuperscript{140} The concept of the historical canon can be described as ‘a historical grand narrative, consisting of selected figures, events, story lines, ideas and values, colligated by definitive plots, perspectives and explanations.\textsuperscript{141} The curriculum carries these attributes and the authority to institutionalise a particular canon.


\textsuperscript{141} Siep Stuurman and Maria Grever, ‘Introduction: Old Canons and New Histories’, p. 3.
There is a reluctance to change the canon as this affects how a culture sees itself represented. The resistance to change in the canon is also predicated on the belief that change may not be based on merit but misguided attempts to be inclusive. In *The Opening of the American Mind*, Lawrence Levine explored the intrinsic relationship between the canon and culture in curriculums. Levine identified that in America the historical canon was a product of culture and in turn, reflects and influences the culture which produces the canon. The debate over the historical canon therefore concerns the inclusion of previously excluded histories into the canon, including histories which some historians deem unworthy of inclusion. The Howard Government’s intervention into the curriculum demonstrates that debate over the canon ‘has always been ... over the culture and the course culture should take.’ The historical canon that Howard envisaged was no longer ‘the winning horse in the contest between different versions of collective memory’ and he perceived that the threat to social cohesion could only be amended through canonical change. Cultural identity is a crucial component in shaping the idea of the nation and Howard had sought to emphasise western civilization as the root of Australian identity and the basis of social cohesion.

In *The Western Canon*, Harold Bloom sought to find the qualities which make works canonical, stating that originally, a school syllabus drawing on a ‘canon’ of perceived wisdom, taught the ‘standard’ of what should be read. Howard blamed the lack of pride in a national identity on a failing curriculum which no longer contained the ‘evolution of

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parliamentary democracy or the ideas that galvanised the Enlightenment’ which was crucial to maintaining the Australia history canon.\textsuperscript{146} In order to amend this, the curriculum needed to be overhauled so that western civilization was recognised as the guiding influence on Australian society and reinstated in the cultural canon. This would be achieved in the creation of a structured chronological narrative of key facts and dates of western civilization. For example, ancient Greece and Rome, the Magna Carta, the War of the Roses and the Enlightenment were seen as representing the ‘the great and enduring heritage of Western civilisation.’\textsuperscript{147} Therefore, the debate over the curriculum is also reflective of a broader cultural anxiety over the representation of the nation.

The authority inherent in a curriculum can be considered in the context of how a nation engages with the concept of civic identities or ethnic identities. A civic identity is recognised by qualities of citizenship as a member of the nation. The duty of citizens to each other and the government in adherence with civil law are core qualities of civic identity. In contrast, ethnic identities are observable by hereditary membership of the nation that derives from kinship as the common heritage. Therefore, the civic nation can be described as a ‘community created by the choice of individuals’ whereas the ethnic nation ‘insists’ that an individual’s deepest attachments are inherited rather than chosen.’\textsuperscript{148} From the 1990s, civics and citizenship education had been a ‘matter of national concern’ which led to the adoption of the National Goals for Schooling aim that students become active and engaged


\textsuperscript{147} John Howard, “The importance of knowing where we came from”, \textit{Quadrant} 56, no. 1, (December 2012).p. 5.

citizens.\textsuperscript{149} As civics is commonly linked with history, ACARA described its importance in allowing students to ‘follow the emergence of key principles of citizenship, the arguments they engendered, the changing institutional forms of government and civil society, and the circumstances in which they have flourished or failed.’\textsuperscript{150} Further, the knowledge of civics is regarded as essential to equipping students with the ability to make ‘informed and morally responsible judgements.’\textsuperscript{151} The ACARA curriculum design paper outlines an indicative guide to the allocation of time for particular subjects. In each year of schooling under year eleven, civics was allocated two percent of teaching time.\textsuperscript{152} In contrast, high school history was only allocated five percent of the total teaching time.\textsuperscript{153}

The Coalition’s privileging of civic identity is problematic. For example, Aboriginal heritage precedes any civic concept of the nation. The appropriation of an ethnic Australian identity by white British Australians further complicates the place of Aboriginal national identity within these categories. A white British ethnic nationalism existed in Australia, although an ‘open, civic, and multicultural Australian identity’ which welcomed Asian immigration did not acknowledge Aboriginals as the original ethnic national identity.\textsuperscript{154} This raises questions as to whether the nation is useful in understanding Aboriginal history which predates a modern concept of the nation. Anthony Smith argues that historically, ethnicity has created

\textsuperscript{153} Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, \textit{History Curriculum Design Paper Version 3}, p. 9.
the common heritage of nations, and that ‘myths, symbols and memory’ are the attributes
of the modern nation not the rights of citizens or knowledge of civil society’s rights and
responsibilities. The conservative’s traditional concept of Australia as British, both in
terms of civic and ethnic identities is challenged by ACARA’s cross curriculum priorities.

The different emphases on civic and ethnic identities in the teaching of history underscores
the different ideological positions of the Coalition and Labor Governments in imagining a
national identity. National identity can encapsulate various civic and ethnic identities and
these identities are fluid and change over time although in a binary structure one is always
privileged and historically, that has been white British Australia. In the 2009 History
Shaping Paper, Macintyre wrote that ‘we fail students - both those who have arrived
recently and those with many earlier generations in this country - if we deny them a
familiarity with the national story, so that they can appreciate its values and binding
tradition.’ Macintyre acknowledges the need to explore the concept of both civic and
ethnic identities to understand Australian history. The commitment to cross-curriculum
priorities suggests ACARA perceives Australia as not needing to clearly delineate ethnic or
civic national identities. The Aboriginal cross-curriculum priority, for example, is an
opportunity for students to ‘analyse reasons why Indigenous peoples may have different
views in relation to history.’ Reconciling an Aboriginal view of the nation with an
established historical understanding of Australia demonstrates the limits of the civic identity
as a concept for fully understanding the nation.

155 Anthony D. Smith, The Nation in History, p. 16.
157 Stuart Macintyre, The Shape of the Australian Curriculum History (Melbourne: Australian Curriculum
Assessment and Reporting Authority 2009), p.12.
Conservatives have argued that the traditional nation as created by the British is under threat from the inclusion of multiple perspectives of the past. A history which provides multiple accounts of events challenges the concept of the civic nation. Conservatives argued the ACARA curriculum fails to recognise the contributions of western civilization in shaping Australia.159 These arguments demonstrate the power the curriculum was perceived to hold as it threatened to undermine traditional understandings of Australian identity. The nation provides citizens ‘with their primary form of belonging’ yet ‘it is not obvious ... why national identity should be a more important element of personal identity than any other.’160 Robert Guyver states ‘the extent to which governments are seeking to use school history in order to ... enforce a uniform or politicised view of the nation’ is emblematic of the debate over history and citizenship education.161 Debates about the place of Aboriginal history in Australian history have been a consistent theme in the process of developing history curriculums.

Australian history, when framed through an Aboriginal perspective, challenges the traditional narrative of the nation. The teaching of Aboriginal histories as central to national identity was both welcomed and scrutinised on release of the ACARA draft curriculums in 2010 which reflected the zeitgeist regarding the role of Aborigines in contemporary society and reinforced the significance of the cross-curriculum priorities.162 The teaching of

159 Chris Berg, National curriculum gets our history badly wrong, Sydney Morning Herald, 9/01/2011; Kevin Donnelly, How the national curriculum sells out our western heritage, Australian Conservative, 26/01/2011
162 Christopher Bantick, Toss out the black armband, Sydney Morning Herald, 11/07/2011; Andrew Stevenson, Stolen Generations’ history is key, Sydney Morning Herald, 29/08/2011.
Aboriginal history as distinct from colonial history is obfuscating as from ‘the moment of first contact, settlers became part of Indigenous history and Indigenous history became part of settler history.’\textsuperscript{163} While the centuries of Macassan excursions to northern Australia for trade have been accepted into the national discourse, instances of Aboriginals travelling on their own volition to places as far away as China are less well known.\textsuperscript{164} British colonists nullified such intercultural relationships in order to present a homogenous Australia created through British rule. To acknowledge that Aborigines had engaged in trade with neighbouring countries which in turn influenced their culture would invalidate British claims of superiority and traditions chronologically richer than Aborigines.

Transnational historiography has developed new fields of inquiry into Indigenous histories which allows historians to ‘trace connections between people, ideas and political movements’ that can be hidden by the primacy of the nation as the analytical framework of history.\textsuperscript{165} The concept of transnational histories can provide an understanding of history outside ‘the narrow confines of an Australian historiography’ by seeking to study ‘the ways in which past lives and events have been shaped by processes and relationships.’\textsuperscript{166} This approach aims to ‘interrogate, situate, supersede, displace, or avoid [national history] altogether.’\textsuperscript{167} Transnational histories provide a means of exploring Indigenous histories that do not fit previous historical frameworks. They allow for the possibility to retell the histories in pertinent and exciting ways. For example, understanding the impact of Aboriginal travel

\textsuperscript{163} Nick Toscano, GC praised fresh look at past, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 3/10/2013.
\textsuperscript{166} Lake and Curthoys, ‘Introduction’, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{167} Marilyn Lake and Ann Curthoys, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.
into Asia on Aboriginal communities would broaden the perspective on the impact of
colonisation and would add further nuance to understanding the history of early colonial
encounters.\textsuperscript{168} A transnational historical frame allows for a reworking of Aboriginal history
which would ‘highlight a long tradition between Aboriginal people and many differing
groups’ further interrogating the relationship between coloniser and colonised.\textsuperscript{169}

The second cross-curriculum priority of ‘Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia’ was also
critiqued by conservatives for rejecting traditional notions of national identity. The purpose
of this cross-curriculum priority is to acknowledge the place of Asia in Australian history.
This priority suggests a transnational approach to Australian history, although the nation
remains the primary analytical tool for developing an understanding of the past. While Asia
has contributed to Australian society and culture, Australian history has not always reflected
how important this relationship has been. Similarly to Aboriginal tradition, there exists an
Asian Australia which has a longer tradition than British Australia. It is important to
understand how ACARA defines Asia to understand the implications of this cross-curriculum
priority. ACARA recognises that Asia is culturally, politically and geographically
heterogeneous. It is defined by characteristics of culture, religion, history and linguistics
within a ‘territorial boundary’ of Pakistan, Mongolia, Japan and Indonesia.\textsuperscript{170} Wang Hui
states that ‘the idea of Asia is not Asian but, rather, European’ and ‘Asian regional
integration includes a number of complex and contradictory features.’\textsuperscript{171} This is an
important consideration which is diminished by the conservative dismissal of the cross-
curriculum priorities.

\textsuperscript{170} Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, \textit{F-10 History curriculum},
The ACARA shaping paper states that Australian history is diverse and only through the study of the ‘distinctive as well as the shared and derivative character of our past’ can this be revealed.\textsuperscript{172} The \textit{Melbourne Declaration} had signified the need for Australians to appreciate and respect social and cultural diversity and identified history as the subject best suited to respond to an increasingly globalised world. This explains a ‘futures orientation focus on globalisation’ within the subject and the importance of an informed historical understanding of the Asia-Pacific region.\textsuperscript{173} By refocusing Australian history toward Asia, it was perceived by conservatives that this, like the first cross curriculum priority, must be at the expense of western civilization. The rationale of shifting the focus of Australian history was perceived by conservatives as evidence of Labor’s use of the curriculum as an ideological tool.

The concept of Orientalism is relevant to this discussion.\textsuperscript{174} Edward Said’s \textit{Orientalism} argues that western knowledge of the East is generated not by facts but by preconceived archetypes of Eastern societies as fundamentally dissimilar from the West\textsuperscript{175}. Said’s argument provides a conceptual framework by which to explain how an emphasis on Asia challenges the traditional concept of the nation. Reconciling the coexistence of both western and eastern influences on national identity is challenging to Australian history which contains various anti-Asian narratives. The slow acceptance by historians of the Asian influences on Australia are explained by the perception of Asia being fundamentally opposed to western values. Henry Reynolds also suggests this stems from an ‘ancestral

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\textsuperscript{172} Macintyre, \textit{History Shaping Paper}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{173} Macintyre, \textit{History Shaping Paper}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{175} Said, \textit{Orientalism}, p. 233.
unease about an empty and vulnerable north’ to invasion by Japan.\textsuperscript{176} Colonialism allowed the British and French to turn ‘the Orient from alien to colonial space.’\textsuperscript{177} The process of changing the space of the Orient was validated with a ‘force of ontological, empirical truth’ that distinguished the fundamental difference between coloniser and colonised.\textsuperscript{178} British Australia held these colonial beliefs about the Orient which was most notably reflected in the White Australia Policy. The Twentieth century brought with it a change in how Australia engaged with and perceived Asia.

Under the Hawke and Keating governments, Labor had embarked on policy objectives to recognise the importance of Asia to Australia. It was understood that if ‘Australia was going to trade with Asia, it had to become of Asia. This included the introduction of compulsory Asian history’.\textsuperscript{179} Under the Keating Government, a cultural policy was initiated to redefine Australian identity and culture. Since the Second World War, multiculturalism had become an attribute of Australian identity and the contribution of migration to ‘Australia’s changing identity as a nation’ resulted in a culturally diverse nation.\textsuperscript{180} Keating’s policy was to embrace a national identity that reflected the contributions of migrants and ‘abandoned...White Australia as an ideal’ that was dependent on Britain.\textsuperscript{181} The traditional nation’s identity which was constructed around being an ‘imperial beneficiary’ was challenged for its narrow conception of Australia.\textsuperscript{182}

\textsuperscript{177} Edward Said, \textit{Orientalism}, p. 211.
\textsuperscript{181} Aly, ‘What’s Right?’, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{182} Aly, ‘What’s Right?’, p. 57.
suspicion but celebrated for its attributes that enriched Australian identity and culture.

Therefore the ACARA focus on engagement with Asia is a continuation of government policy and reflective of the broader cultural zeitgeist which embraces Asian culture and its place within Australian identity.

Having released the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* in 2012, the Federal Labor Government signified a turn to Asia for Australia’s future. The history curriculum as a political creation reflects similar sentiments in recognising the present and past influence of Asia. The curriculum is just one piece of an ideological approach as Julia Gilliard’s foreword to the White Paper illustrates: ‘history teaches us that as economic weight shifts, so does strategic weight.’\(^{183}\) The inclusion of an Asian cross-curriculum perspective in the curriculum is a reflection of the ‘social, cultural, political, and economic’ engagement between Asia and Australia.\(^{184}\) ACARA states that the aim of this framework is to ensure students ‘understand the ongoing role played by Australia and individual Australians, including Australians of Asian heritage, in major events and developments in the Asia region.’\(^{185}\) This also extends to developing a greater understanding of Australia’s cultural diversity and the changing relationship toward acknowledging the role of Asia in Australian identity.

While Australian historiography has moved toward embracing transnational history, the curriculum is often slower to embrace advances in the discourse. Jenny Lawless commented that ‘the curriculum will reflect changes in historiography as we go along’ but ‘will not ever


catch up’ completely.\textsuperscript{186} The curriculum reacts to developments in historiography as it is not the place of knowledge creation but of developing historical consciousness. A recent historiographical advance in Australian history has been the examination of the ‘triangular relationship between Asians, Aboriginals and white Australia.’\textsuperscript{187} The stories of Asian-Aboriginals have been written ‘outside the national story’ but slowly are being written back in and acceptance of these stories by the curriculum as prescribed by ACARA ensures a place for this discourse within Australian historiography.\textsuperscript{188} The curriculum’s potential to incorporate aspects of the past that have previously been marginalised was not acknowledged by the Coalition. Rather, the expansion of Australian historical consciousness through recognition of a heterogeneous nation was seen to diminish the place of British tradition in Australian history.

Declaring that Australian history is the outcome of British heritage and extension of western civilization is in itself challenging to the concept of nation as heterogeneous. Opposition Education spokesperson, Christopher Pyne’s commentary on the necessity for students to understand British institutions overlooks the complexity of Australian history beyond its origins as a British colony.\textsuperscript{189} While cross-curriculum priorities are challenging to the traditional concept of the nation, they generate discussion and interrogation about the distinct characteristics of the Australian nation. Some questions are not easily answerable but of importance is the scrutiny of the past. This is a fundamental skill and feature of doing history. The curriculum is a powerful ideological tool as its use by politicians demonstrates.

\textsuperscript{186} Jenny Lawless, Interviewed by Zeb Woodpower, (Sydney, 16 July, 2013, (in author’s possession).
\textsuperscript{188} Stephenson, \textit{The Outsiders Within}, p. 209.
However, the curriculum remains behind historiographical advances as the example of acknowledging the role of Asia on Australian society suggests. This chapter began by describing how Labor sought to remove politics from the curriculum but the Coalition argued that the potential to utilise the curriculum for ideological purposes nullified Labor’s sentiments. In effect, Labor’s efforts were reduced to rhetoric. During the ACARA process the debate over the curriculum turned to content and how history should be taught was no longer the central issue. Of concern was what the nation was represented to be and how the curriculum promoted a particular concept of Australia.
Chapter Three: Imagining the Nation

The debates in response to the release of the ACARA curriculum illustrate the complexities involved in devising a national history curriculum. Both sides of politics argued that the Australian history curriculum was being used to promote vested ideologies. Criticism by the Coalition was based on the perception that the history curriculum was used by Labor to present a particular concept of the nation and that western civilization was no longer being emphasised as the shaping force on Australian history. The debates reflected wider cultural anxiety over national identity and how in recent times the Coalition believed that social cohesion was achieved through upholding Judeo-Christian ethics. These debates are evidence of the importance of history to national identity and the contemporary ideological positions of both the left and right in Australia.

This chapter will explore how the rhetoric of the Coalition in particular, persistently sought to represent Australia as a nation rooted in British Heritage, Judeo-Christian ethics, and western civilisation. The Coalition as well as the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) argued that the ACARA curriculum ignored these influences. However ACARA maintains that the curriculum did not reject these influences, and its cross curriculum priorities ensured a broader understanding of Australian history. The conceptualisation of the principle influence on a nation can be explored through the idea of colonial narrative as Genesis.190 This form of historical narrative suggests the nation is inaugurated in a founding act. It also implies a narrow conception of the colonial nation as having no prior existence. Central to this narrative, as employed by the Coalition, is the construction of tradition and the use of Judaeo-Christian ethics to imply a continuous identity and common heritage.

190 Graeme Davison, Narrating the Nation in Australia (London: Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, King’s College, University of London, 2010), p. 11.
The inclusion of cross-curriculum priorities was perceived by the Coalition to be at the expense of a focus on western civilization. The argument that Australian history was shaped by the values and principles of western civilization suggests a homogenous past. David Cannadine expresses the need to be very wary of the intellectuals, historians and politicians who assert a ‘binary, Manichean view of the past.’ Ideas about religion, nation, class, gender, race and civilization are complex and often contradict each other and this is a feature of history. The Coalition and conservative think-tank’s insistence on Australian history as rooted in western civilization and Judeo-Christian ideals is evidence of the attempt to create a perspective of the past in clearly defined categories. Presenting the past as free from contradictory ideals and values, simplifies the development of cultures and fails to understand the myriad forces behind the construction of the world. The Labor Government were perceived to be ideologically refining the concept of the nation that embraced a multiplicity of identities, contradicting a factual chronological narrative of Australian history.

During the development and release of the ACARA curriculum, Coalition Education spokesman Christopher Pyne was consistently vocal in his criticism of the curriculum and pledged to rewrite the curriculum if elected. In an address to the IPA, Pyne ‘accuse[d] curriculum writers of neglecting the contributions of Britain, Ancient Greece and Rome to Western civilisation because of an undue emphasis on indigenous culture, Asia and sustainability.’ His comments were said to be ‘patently false’ by ACARA but this did not

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stop Pyne from reiterating his criticisms. During an appearance on the ABC television program Q & A, Pyne stated the Coalition would change the ACARA curriculum as it ‘fundamentally misses the point of teaching our young people why Australia is as it is today, which is because of our history of Western civilisation and our Judeo Christian ethic.’

Responses to Pyne’s assertions included that he was spreading ‘myths’ about the Australian history curriculum. A theme in the refutation of his comments was that Pyne had not actually read the curriculum. His comments on the Marxist influence on the curriculum in reference to Macintyre implied, incorrectly, that the ACARA history curriculum was the work of a single author. John Howard was also critical of the apparent biases in the curriculum, stating the ‘purging of British history from the curriculum is particularly blameworthy.’ Conservative politicians’ engagement in the debates largely related to the perceived ideological biases of the curriculum. The pattern of their critiques, which were often refuted as unfounded, detracted from the possibility for non-partisan discussions over the past and how it should be represented.

The Coalition’s insistence on reinforcing the concept of the nation according to their terms signalled a re-engagement of the history wars. The Coalition and interested Conservatives criticised the ACARA conception of the nation as heterogeneous, perceiving this as marginalising their ideological view of the nation. In contrast, the Labor Government rarely

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193 Dan Harrison and Anna Patty, Coalition would scrap curriculum, The Age, 31/1/2011.
overtly refuted the Coalition’s political encroachments into the history curriculum. With the exceptions of Kevin Rudd and John Della Bosca, there was a lack of engagement with the Coalition over their ideological views during the terms of the Howard government. In contrast, the Coalition made a habit of continually criticising Labor’s rhetoric of depoliticising the Australian history curriculum. Rudd’s approach to ‘embrace a balanced’ history was criticised by Howard for misunderstanding the intellectual framework of the history wars. While Labor remained largely silent, the Coalition attracted numerous headlines for their false accusations regarding the curriculum. Tony Taylor was the author of several of these articles which became formulaic in stating the ‘political interference’ was predominantly from the Coalition and providing excerpts from the curriculum of the details which the Coalition claimed to be missing.

The three conceptual terms of British Heritage, Judeo-Christian ethics and western civilization that the Coalition drew on to reinforce their concept of the nation have distinct qualities. The importance of British heritage is evidenced by the colonisation of Australia by Britain and the Coalition deeming this event as the origin of the nation. As Australia is intrinsically tied to British history, the Coalition argued that understanding the inheritance from the imperial power is imperative. The use of the rhetoric of western civilization implies the influence on Australia of religion, law, philosophy, arts and literature largely from Western Europe. Combined with British heritage, the legacy of western civilization is seen to be reflected in parliamentary law and democracy and crucial to understanding the civic

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199 Phillip Coorey, Rudd squirmishes with Howard over the history wars, Sydney Morning Herald, 28/4/2009
nation. Judeo-Christian ethics are conceptualised as the moral and religious dimension of
the nation. Consequently, the Coalition argues that the nation cannot be properly
understood without recognising that Australian history is founded on western civilisation,
that ‘the Judeo-Christian influence is a reality and the British inheritance is self-evident’ in
Australian history.201

The Coalition’s use of these concepts tended to be inconsistent and interchangeable which
exposes flaws in the logic of their approach. The conservative rationale for the primacy of
British history in the curriculum arises from their belief that ‘British imperial influence
underpins all that is good about Australian history.’202 In contrast, Taylor argues that British
influence on Australia is overstated, ‘ahistorical’ and ‘bad history’ and that this rhetoric
espouses a narrow conception of Australian identity.203 An example of the conservative’s
misconstruing of terms can be seen in Tony Abbott’s reiteration at the History Summit that
the focus of the Australian history curriculum should be British history. Academic Historian
John Hirst, who attended the summit, claims this approach ‘overlooked the importance of
the values and traditions Australia inherited from Western Europe.’204 Hirst explains that
‘Copernicus and Galileo were not English ... and the Enlightenment is first of all French’ and
that ‘when Tony Abbott said focus on English history, he was remembering he is a
monarchist but forgot he is a Catholic.’205 The Coalition’s adoption of the Judeo-Christian
rhetoric at a late stage in the curriculum debate seemed to be a response to recognising the
limitations of privileging British history.

201 John Howard, “Knowing Where We Came From”, p. 28.
204 Justine Ferrari, British history is not the whole story, The Australian, 16/10/2008.
205 Justine Ferrari, British history is not the whole story, The Australian, 16/10/2008.
The Coalition’s responses to the ACARA curriculum can be conceptualised through the framework of a Genesis narrative. Graeme Davidson suggests that most colonial nations have strong foundational narratives similar to Genesis. The narrative of Genesis as ‘the paradigm of national myth-making in the age of empire’ can be seen in the declaration of Australia as *terra nullius* which served as the founding act of the nation. This ensured that the origins of Australia and its tradition began with the British arrival in 1788 and that Aboriginals cannot claim a prior existence. This Genesis narrative has been critically scrutinised from the mid-1970s onward as insistence on the inauguration of the nation cannot embrace ‘people who believe that they have always been there.’ Levine argues that the ‘point of origin is only part of the story.’ Contradicting Levine’s argument, conservatives have consistently argued that British arrival in Australia is the single most influential event in shaping the nation. Davidson argues that the narrative of Genesis has been ‘re-born in a more pluralist and democratic form’ which recognises all voyages of immigrants as inaugurating the nation. The concept of a colonial Genesis narrative in the Australian context reveals the historical tension within accommodating Aboriginals as inhabitants of the nation for over 50,000 years.

In the 1968 ABC Boyer Lecture series, W.E.H. Stanner announced there was a ‘Great Australian Silence’ regarding the Aboriginal dispossession. His comments exposed the absence of Aboriginal affairs in mainstream society and the possibility of reconciliation.

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206 Graeme Davidson, *Narrating the Nation in Australia*, p. 11.
207 Davidson, *Narrating the Nation*, p. 15.
208 Davidson, *Narrating the Nation*, p. 19.
210 Davidson, *Narrating the Nation*, p. 19.
through a question of the ownership of land to end this silence. The silence surrounding Aboriginal history had been perpetuated in the classroom through the Genesis narrative. The lectures provided the inspiration for Henry Reynolds ‘life agenda’ and scholarship of Aboriginal history.\textsuperscript{212} Having encountered such a ‘deficiency’ of Aboriginal and Australian history during his 1950s school education that he could remember ‘nothing at all about Aboriginal history,’ the words of Stanner inspired Reynolds to explore Aboriginal dispossession.\textsuperscript{213} For the non-Indigenous Australian public, the Boyer Lectures were a moral awakening which challenged the traditional Genesis narrative of Australia with competing accounts of the past. The lack of Aboriginal history in the school curriculum was partly explained by ‘historians [who] had simply been uninterested.’\textsuperscript{214} A moral dimension of the place of Aboriginals in Australian history was a catalyst for addressing the inadequacy of a Genesis narrative. The inclusion of Aboriginal histories into history curriculums from the 1960s did not undermine the ‘Western and Judeo-Christian heritage’ of the nation.\textsuperscript{215} The suggestion then that the ACARA inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres-Strait Islander perspectives of the past would challenge the primacy of the conservative concept of the nation is questionable and lacks convincing evidence.

The insistence on Australia’s development as a nation being deeply influenced by a ‘Judeo-Christian heritage’ symbolises the fabrication of heritage and homogenous influences on the nation.\textsuperscript{216} The term demonstrates that there are important nuances overlooked in

\begin{itemize}
\item Stanner, \textit{The Dreaming & Other Essays}, p. 6.
\item Reynolds, \textit{Why Weren’t We Told}, p. 14.
\item Kevin Donnelly, \textit{Australia’s Education Revolution} (Ballan: Connor Court, 2009), pp. 61-62.
\end{itemize}
purporting this concept of heritage. In a reactive and polarised Australian historiography, this rhetoric is symbolic of the division which typifies the debates. The rhetoric of Christian heritage as cultural value is ‘essentially a political idea’ that tends to reinforce a historicised conservative image of the past. The use of Judeo-Christian ethics by the Coalition to describe the cultural roots of Australian identity draws on an idea which is criticised for purporting a traditional view that is ‘shot through with falsification, distortion, and untruth.’ The historical approach of Conservatives in claiming a linear narrative of Judeo-Christian ethics is referred to as ‘knowledgeable ignorance’ by Taylor as it overlooks specifics to create an ideological impression of the past.

The example of a nation rooted in Judeo-Christian ethics is both exclusive of other identities and a narrow conception of national identity. The espousal of Australia as a Judeo-Christian nation establishes distinct cultural boundaries and this act of demarcation is an attempt at cultural preservation. Conservatives suggest that the traditional concept of the nation would be at risk with the ‘purging’ of British history from the curriculum. The strength of national narratives was in part due to the rejection of certain ethnic or religious groups considered a threat to national identity and the dismissal of Aboriginal histories was evidence of this fear. Judeo-Christian ethics privilege Christian values as a common quality of the nation which follows the concept of the historical narrative as Genesis. Rudd was intent on shaping a new paradigm of politics distinct from Howard’s insistence on right-

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220 Howard, “Knowing Where We Came From”, p. 29.
wing Christian extremism as his ‘hand maiden.’ Rudd believed that Howard was monopolising religion as an ideal exclusive to the right.

Tradition is forged through the cultivation of a particular history integral to how the nation imagines itself and moral judgements are cast. The ‘pageantry which surrounds British monarchy’ is the quintessence of tradition with its success in exhibiting continuity with the past. The rationale of tradition resides precisely in the ‘attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past’ which often involves mythologising the past to illustrate stability. However, tradition is often ‘quite recent in origin and sometimes invented’ and the narrative of Australia as a British nation is evidence of historical invention. Continuity is important in establishing and maintaining the ethical and moral framework of the nation which can involve mythologising the past to create tradition. Losing touch with the moral lessons of the past ends the possibility of learning from these experiences.

The religious language of Judeo-Christian ethics implies a moral characteristic of identity that is under threat from new inclusions to the Australian history canon. A narrative is a simple means by which a link of continuity establishes the role of the past in the present. However a linear narrative can imply a lack of contestability of historical events and therefore the invention of traditions is necessary to maintain an uninterrupted narrative.

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and the justification may be ‘technical rather than ideological.’\textsuperscript{227} That is, certain values and moral lessons deemed of importance to the present are worth preserving and following. When their origins are unclear, invention provides a means to end their contestability. The past provides the ‘moral depth of tradition’ and although tradition is invented, the ‘practices of a ritual and symbolic nature’ implies continuity with the past, inculcating values and norms of behaviour codified as tradition.\textsuperscript{228} The ACARA curriculum’s inclusion of an Asian perspective suggests a nation looking forward and the need to understand its future engagements by understanding the past.

\section*{II}

In late 2012, John Howard joined the chorus of criticism directed at the Australian national history curriculum after largely remaining silent on the discourse since 2007. Howard reiterated his views on the heritage of Western civilisation during the inaugural Sir Paul Hasluck Lecture which set the tone for a final push by the Coalition to denounce the curriculum for ignoring the traditions of Australia. Explaining, that in Australia, ‘we speak the English language’ and ‘we share all of the advantages and identity of Western civilization’ he argued that it was unthinkable the ACARA history curriculum could ‘marginalise the historic influence of the Judaeo Christian ethic’ on Australian society.\textsuperscript{229} This speech was consistent with the Institute of Public Affairs’ view of the curriculum as light on western civilization and failing to accurately convey the Australian achievement.\textsuperscript{230} In the speech, Howard stated that the ‘laudable goals of enhancing the teaching of Aboriginal and

\textsuperscript{227} Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction’, p. 3; Feldman, “Revolt Against Cultural Authority”, p. 952.
\textsuperscript{229} Howard, “Importance of knowing where we came from”, p. 28.
Asian history could have been fully achieved by the curriculum’s authors without relegating or virtually eliminating the study of influences vital to a proper understanding of who we are as a people and where we came from.\textsuperscript{231} Taylor claimed Howard misunderstood the aims of school history which he argues is far more than learning facts about certain traditions: ‘the study of history even at school level is not just about celebration nor is it just about commemoration. It is fundamentally about investigation and explanation.’\textsuperscript{232} Howard’s speech was further evidence of the perceived power and authority invested in the curriculum. His comments reflected the inconsistent arguments of conservatives with the slippage of terminology between Judeo-Christian ethics and western civilization heritage. The comments by Howard gave an authority to criticisms of the curriculum that was previously absent and this compelled ACARA to publically reject his claims.

Following Howard’s speech, ACARA released their first media response in just over two years in defence of the curriculum. It was a strongly worded rejection of Howard’s assertion that the curriculum neglected ‘Western Civilisation or the Judeo-Christian roots of our common heritage. Their influences on Australian culture and our legal and political systems are clearly dealt with.’\textsuperscript{233} It also stated that teaching Australian history in a global context did not ‘prejudice our Western and Judeo-Christian heritage.’\textsuperscript{234} The media release provided a year-by-year account of where western civilization was situated in the curriculum. For example, it stated the study of ‘Australia’s system of law and government’ includes the

\textsuperscript{231} Howard, “The Importance of Knowing Where We Came From”, p. 28.


‘Magna Carta, federalism, constitutional monarchy, the Westminster system and the separation of powers.’ Howard’s comments saw the history curriculum back on the front page and a new round of media interest in the ideological battles over the history.

The national history curriculum has initiated debates about how Australian identity is represented. The purported missing British components in the curriculum adhere to the arguments in the cultural wars phenomena by opponents of multiculturalism that western civilization is increasingly diluted by new histories. This line of argument is reductive as ‘in a globalizing (sic) world an inward-looking national canon will become less and less convincing’ and therefore new inclusions into the history curriculum strengthen national identity. Education is a key battleground in the ‘long standing contest between pluralism and homogeneity’ between ‘orthodox’ conservatives and ‘progressives’ with ‘overheated rhetoric’ of partisan ideology illustrating the cultural authority of the history curriculum.

The historiographical formation of the canon is through ‘deep social and cultural forces’ which are not always easily or immediately accepted. Conservatives tend to perceive that inclusion of multiculturalism means an immediate exclusion of the traditional canon. Lawrence Levine suggests the cultural warriors educated by the ‘traditional’ curriculum which taught the superiority of western ideas misunderstood the aims of education and the

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239 Levine, Opening of the American Mind, p. 97.
traditions of western culture as questioning the traditional curriculum is not ‘anti-Western or anti-intellectual’ but typifies western philosophy.\textsuperscript{240}

The suggestion of a linear tradition of western civilization ignores the cultural and historical processes by which this heritage evolves. It is crucial to understanding national identity and culture to ‘study and understand as many of the contributing cultures and their interactions with one another as possible.’\textsuperscript{241} Levine argues that this understanding of ‘contributing cultures ... [is] not a matter of “therapeutic” history, as the opponents of multiculturalism keep insisting...but as a simple matter of understanding the nature and complexities’ of the nation.\textsuperscript{242} Arguably to understand the foundations of Australian identity, an inclusive examination of the past is appropriate. Within the ACARA curriculum it is not only Aboriginal or Asian perspectives that are included but the changing social landscape post World War Two which contributed to ‘Australia’s culturally diverse society.’\textsuperscript{243}

Levine expresses the need to ‘value our intellectual heritage not by rote but through comprehension and examination, to continually and perpetually subject the ‘wisdom’ of our society to thorough and thoughtful scrutiny while making the ‘wisdom’ of other societies and other cultures accessible.’\textsuperscript{244} While ACARA is criticised for rejecting the Judeo-Christian heritage of Australia, it is committed to its aim that history equips students with the

\textsuperscript{241} Levine, \textit{Opening of the American Mind}, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{242} Levine, \textit{Opening of the American Mind}, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{244} Levine, \textit{Opening of the American Mind}, p.21.
‘knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the past and the forces that shape societies.’

The Labor government experienced considerable success in their education revolution and the complete overhaul of the school curriculum. However, the Coalition’s language now that they are in Government, suggests that the national curriculum’s future remains far from safe. This thesis has argued that political intervention into the teaching of history has been at the expense of historiographical investigations into how Australia is represented. As a result, the political motivations for change compromised the outcomes of both Coalition and Labor curriculums. It has been shown that political intervention into the process of curriculum development increasingly politicised professional attempts to improve the teaching of history. The political approach was directed by divisions of ideology detracting from discussion of the most appropriate way to teach. In directing the debate toward political balance in the curriculum, it became another piece in the political cycle as questions of historiography were of minor concern. The implications of a curriculum’s influence as cultural authority, seen to extend far beyond the classroom, explains the rationale for the continuous political interventions and commentary on developing the history curriculum while other subjects attracted minimal scrutiny.

The rhetoric and terminology of disputes over the curriculum invoked a narrow and conflicted imagining of the nation. While the classroom was the battleground, skirmishes were constantly played out in the media illustrating the propensity to be caught up in the political cycle. The vexatious political debate had its roots in the history wars as the

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protagonists, ‘academics, “mercenaries” and ideologues’ took centre stage.\textsuperscript{246} In the public sphere historical was perpetuated as a discourse of opinion reflected in the commissioning of opinion pieces by newspapers rather than of scrutiny and inspection of the past. As a document of cultural authority, the curriculum’s power resides in its ability to influence epistemology of the nation. The debates ultimately were over a document confined to teaching in the classroom, yet one that metonymically represented how the nation imagines itself when looking back at its past.

\textsuperscript{246} Anna Clark, ‘Ordinary Peoples History’, \textit{History Australia} 9, no. 1 (2012), p. 203
Epilogue

The future of an Australian history discourse that will continue to be politically divisive and polarised was made evident during the 2013 Federal election campaign. In the final week of the campaign during an address to the National Press Club, Tony Abbot was asked about his party’s plan for the national curriculum. He responded that he believed the history curriculum currently had a partisan focus which would be reviewed by his incoming government. He cited as evidence for such partisanship that the curriculum covered the histories of trade unions and the Australian Labor party, but failed to emphasise Liberal prime ministers or the importance of industry and business in Australia’s history. Abbott further suggested that the curriculum was characterised by a ‘lack of references to our heritage other than an Indigenous heritage.’ The comments were interpreted as Abbott’s ‘attempt to put his own political stamp’ on the history curriculum.

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