

Why you should boycott Australia Day

Anarchist Affinity

20 January 2017

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The National Australia Day Council describes Australia Day as “a day to reflect on what we have achieved and what we can be proud of in our great nation,” and a “day for us to re-commit to making Australia an even better place for the generations to come”.

But for many January 26 is no date to celebrate, and to fully understand why, we must recognise the price of this “great nation’s” achievements over the past 229 years.

The 26th of January 2017 will mark 229 years since the British invaded what is now known as Australia. It was on this date in 1788 that Captain Arthur Phillip raised the Union Jack for the first time in Sydney Cove, symbolising British occupation.

When Australia was invaded, British colonisers declared this continent *terra nullius*: “nobody’s land”; a law which describes territory that has never been subject to the sovereignty of any state. Terra Nullius was granted despite the land already being occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations for over 60, 000 years.

Despite acts of resistance, Australia was brutally colonised as British settlers stole Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and enacted massacres through state policy.

The Frontier Wars spanned the first 140 years of colonisation. When the invasion commenced, there were approximately 750,000 people living in 350 distinct nations on the Australian landmass. By 1900, only 93,200 Indigenous people survived. At least twenty thousand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were killed or murdered in untold battles and massacres from Hobart to the Kimberley. Approximately two and half thousand invaders were killed as Aboriginal people resisted extermination.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Australian state continued to dehumanise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and commit acts of genocide under new laws. A policy called ‘Smooth the Dying Pillow’ allowed indiscriminate killings well into the 1930’s under the assumption that what was left of the Aboriginal population would die out.¹

In 1901 the Australian state introduced ‘the White Australia policy’, making Anglocentric whiteness the ultimate marker of citizenship. This meant Indigenous Australians could not vote, own property, receive wages for work, travel, or receive legal representation². Prior to the 1967 Referendum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were viewed as ‘sub-human’ and weren’t counted as citizens for the census, but rather were categorised as part of the national flora and fauna.

Until 1970 Aboriginal workers were for all intents and purposes enslaved. They sold their labour power to white men but were denied access to their wages which were often stolen by the state³.

To those who think colonisation and structural racism are a thing of the past, or that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to ‘get over it’, take a look at recent statistics:

Despite a formal apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008, the Australian state continues to dehumanise Aboriginal peoples through institutionalised racism and state violence. 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are taken from their families every month, making the number of removals higher now than during the Stolen Generations period. 48% of juveniles in detention are Aboriginal, and like Dylan Voller, many experience physical abuse and trauma.

¹ Foley, G. (1999). *Whiteness and Blackness in the struggle for self-determination*

² Moreton-Robinson, A. (2004). Whiteness, epistemology & Indigenous representation. In Morton-Robinson, A. (Ed.). *Whitening Race: Essays in social and cultural criticism*.

³ Korf, J. (2016). *Stolen Wages*. <www.CreativeSpirits.info>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are massively over represented in Australia's criminal justice system. Though only representing 3% of the total population, more than 28% of Australia's prison population are Aboriginal. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners make up 86% of the prison population.

Between 2000 and 2007 there were 701 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in police custody. The recent release of CCTV footage at the time of Ms Dhu's death highlight the disregard for her welfare and right to medical treatment.

This year the continued forced closures of Aboriginal communities is creating higher rates of homelessness and poverty for those affected. The removals also sever an intrinsic connection to country known to be important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.

Day of Mourning, Invasion Day, Survival Day

In 1938, on the 150th Australia Day celebrations, the first 'Day of Mourning Protest' was held. Activists marched silently through the streets and held a conference for equal rights and citizenship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. 'Australia Day' has since been rejected and renamed by many as either 'Invasion Day' which mourns the invasion of British colonisers, or 'Survival Day' which recognises the continued survival of First Nations people.

How does this position you?

If you are a non-Indigenous person living in Australia, regardless of your family history or the colour of your skin, you directly benefit from the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Any privileges you enjoy living in this country come at the expense of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

*"To different degrees every colonizer is privileged, at least comparatively so, ultimately to the detriment of the colonized...this can be read by the relation of each group's concrete economic and psychological position within the colonial society."*⁴

Celebrating Australia Day, a day which rejoices in the European invasion, is only appealing to those who do not know, or those who do not care, about Australia's black history. It is absurd and insensitive to hold a day of patriotic celebration on a day that marks the beginning of the genocide and dispossession of the owners of this land.

Having a choice to celebrate Australia Day is a marker of settler privilege. As a non-Indigenous person living on stolen land, I acknowledge my privilege and choose to reject this day. I am not proud and I will not celebrate.

The National Australia Day Council recognises this day as a day to recommit to making Australia better for generations to come. Celebrating this day however, no matter the pretense, eradicates history and identity.

The recent lamb advert shows a fictitious Australia that is founded on both multiculturalism and nationalism, but pointedly leaves out the brutal massacres of Indigenous peoples and the

⁴ (Memmi, A. (1965). *The colonizer and the colonized*. p77, 79

dispossession of land and culture. Many Australians see this ad as a step towards inclusivity, but it is just another platform for the whitewashing of Australian history.

Celebrating more ‘inclusively’ on the day by not calling your event an ‘Australia Day Party’ or making a quick acknowledgement of country is not enough. Though these gestures recognise the extreme inappropriateness of holding a celebration on this day, they do little to raise the issues of continued oppression of Indigenous Australians or call for treaty.

I ask you to join me in completely boycotting this day. Instead, show solidarity and stand alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and demand justice.

What can you do?

As a non-Indigenous ally to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, I propose the following strategies to show your solidarity:

Educate yourself and other non-Indigenous people. Learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, the colonisation of Australia, the Frontier Wars, and the ongoing struggle for self-determination.

Explain to your friends and family why you won’t be celebrating Australia Day this year and ask them to join you. Lessen the burden on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to do this educating.

When possible, listen to and respect the stories and opinions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. If you have questions, ask them, but recognise that you are not entitled to this education. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may not want to do this labour. It is not their responsibility to educate you.

Don’t interrupt or whitesplain racism. If you get called out for problematic behaviour or language don’t get defensive, listen. Acknowledge what happened and apologise, if needed, for any harm caused. Move forward and use this experience to help others learn too.

Attend a Survival or Invasion Day event in solidarity. Respect that the terms of the event are at the discretion of the organisers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in attendance.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that we organise on, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations, and pay our respects to elders both past and present, and also extend that respect to any Aboriginal people reading this article. We also acknowledge that this land was stolen and that sovereignty was never ceded.

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