

## Oration: A Social Historian Speaks on Arguing About 1942

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Thank you very much for that and David and for the invitation today. I'm delighted to be here. Delighted to be out isn't it, wonderful to be doing something in person, as wonderful as Zoom is it's not quite the same is it. I begin by acknowledging the Gadigal people custodians of the country we meet, and I acknowledge also all those Australians who've given their lives in defence of their country.

Ladies, gentlemen, and distinguished guests there are the times in history I guess as in our private lives that take on an unusual intensity, I think that Darren Mitchell's comments in his introduction about those months at the end of 1941 and 42 evoke a comparison with what the final months of 2019 and early 2020 were a bit like for many of us. Bushfires and pandemic followed one another in quick succession, many lives were turned upside down. I think the months between August 1941 and February 1942 must have felt like that on a much greater scale. Three prime ministers in the space of a few weeks and a change of government<sup>1</sup>, Pearl Harbor, a dramatic public appeal to the United States by Prime Minister Curtin, the southward thrust of Japan, the fall of Singapore, the bombing of Darwin. And that's not all of it.

There was a time, not that long ago, when Australian historians took for granted, I think that all of this amounted to the shaping of modern Australia. A landmark in the making of a national identity or an Australian consciousness. In a much-quoted contribution to the crisis edition of the magazine *Meanjin*<sup>2</sup> published in March 1942 the novelist Vance Palmer declared: "The next few months may decide not only whether we are to survive as a nation but whether we deserve to survive. We have no monuments to speak of, no dreams in stone, no <sup>3</sup>Guernica's, no sacred places we could vanish and leave from. Singularly few signs that for some generations there would live the people who had made a homeland of this Australian earth, a homeland to how many people was it primarily that how many penetrated the soil with their love and imagination." Now to a modern sensibility it's perhaps the whiteness of these words that might be most striking. No achievements, no sacred places, no one who'd penetrated the soil with their love and imagination. But, Palmer of course had the then accepted bias of a white Australian "settler". People who often took the view that if Australia had no more character than could be seen as the work of the settlers, it would be annihilated as surely and swiftly as those colonial outposts white men built for their commercial profit.

But there is an Australia of the spirit submerged and not very articulate in 1942 that is quite different from these bubbles of old world imperialism Palmer thought. Australia would survive and we were to come out of the struggle better. Stripped to the bone, but spiritually sounder than we went in; sure, of our essential character, adults in a wider world than the one we have lived in hitherto. Jeffrey Blainey with the tyranny of time displacement, in 1966 said "Australia carried spectacles from Britain that were obsolete. The fall of Singapore and the Japanese advance corrected their short-sightedness." It's his phrase "short-sightedness" according to his teacher Manning Clark writing in the 1980s (in 1942 he was a school master at Geelong Grammar) that was most insightful. Manning Clark wrote: "The war unleashed forces that would turn Australian Britons into the museum pieces or darling dodos of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." The war Clark said "gave us a chance to free ourselves from the stigma of mediocrity and inferiority". Noah McLaughlin another student of Clark

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Ministers: Menzies, Fadden, Curtin. UAP change to Labor government.

<sup>2</sup> *Meanjin* a lively journal of literature and ideas first published by MUP in 1940, continues today.

<sup>3</sup> Grand painting by Picasso.

argued similarly that the possibility of a Japanese invasion gave and I quote “the heftiest hoist ever to Australian consciousness”. Now I think these waters were muddied a bit in the early 1990s mainly by the controversies that were stirred by Paul Keating as a part of his republican push and his quest for closer engagement with Asia, coinciding with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Singapore’s fall.

Keating launched an extraordinary round of history wars denying that he had and I quote some cultural cringe to a country which decided not to defend the Malayan peninsula, not to worry about Singapore and not to give us our troops back to keep ourselves free from Japanese domination. This idea of an Australian nationalism sometimes betrayed but never quite able to flourish. Independence unable to take root because regularly thwarted by a British imperial overlord received some rough handling from historians from the early years of this century. Most of them based like Keating himself here in Sydney. They argued that Australian nationalism was really British race patriotism until Britain turned decisively to Europe in the early 1960s with its first bid, unsuccessful of course, to enter the European economic community. ‘Twas said that often looks like Australian nationalism was really just a local provincialism. Reaction even to the shock of the fall of Singapore did not disclose any larger sense of cultural or national identity. The misguided implication that Australia had no cultural or national identity that was other than a species of British race patriotism meaning reduces “Australia of the spirit” to provincial distinctions comparable to those of Cornwall and Yorkshire in the UK.

What i’m going to say today will show that I disagree with the argument the rapid and dramatic shifts in power politics and notably the collapse of the British Empire in southeast Asia in the 1940s laid the foundations for Australian independence. I choose my words carefully. Australia did not become independent in 1942<sup>4</sup> most Australians probably continued to think of themselves as in some sense British.

Not all of them have equal strength but it is still a prevailing idea but national independence rests on several pillars: constitutional, political, strategic, diplomatic, economic, social, cultural. Even a cursory reading of the cable traffic from 1942 between Canberra and London over the question of the diversion of troops reveals all too clearly that the world of 1914 to 18 had long passed. After the debacle of the Greek campaign in 1941 which had helped to destroy Bob Menzies prime ministership, a newly installed Labor government well understood that it couldn't afford to be implicated in a similar shambles by giving overriding priority to the defence of continental Australia in its public rhetoric, and in confidential dealings with Whitehall.

Australian decision makers did inevitably reject key aspects of imperial thinking. In 1942 the imperial view was that greatest strategic problem in the south of Asia was the threat to India and Burma rather than Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. The Australian government was also rejecting the assurances of London and Washington that Australian interests would be looked after so long as China could withstand Japan. Whether the greater allies were right in strategic terms doesn't matter much. Australia's politicians, bureaucrats and generals had now grasped that the primary responsibility of the state is to protect its people from coming under the rule of another state.

The journalist Warren Denning told a Canadian diplomat in 1944 that despite verbal tributes to Britain from Curtin and others, and I quote here “Australia's basic relationship to the UK had undergone a radical change as a result of the failure of the British fleet to protect this country against the Japanese. The confidence has been shattered and will never be restored.” My argument here is that he was right. Historians downgrading of the significance of the fall of Singapore and of 1942 generally has

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<sup>4</sup> Do note , however, that after Viceregal assent was applied to the Statute of Westminster Adoption Act on 9 October 1942, Australia gained a greater level of sovereignty than it has otherwise gained.

obscured rather than helped our understanding of the profound shifts in Australian identity that have occurred in the 80 years since.

To make my case about Australian independence I'll briefly examine six areas:

- politics;
- diplomacy;
- strategy;
- the economy;
- the experience of indigenous people; and
- the realm of culture.

### **Politics**

So let me turn to each of those; we might just get to the end of the politics bit before our break

Now it's often been said that John Curtin who during the first world war an anti-conscriptionist was an unlikely warlord. The late John Hurst suggested that he was so afraid of being harmed at the hands of the enemy, so sensitive to the casualties that fighting demanded, it undermined his ability to lead a nation at war. Yet Curtin also had convictions qualities and skills that suited the time. The war called for levels of government control over the nation's life that were a more comfortable ideological fit for a nominally socialist party than for the United Australia Party of Lyons and Menzies (not of Clive Palmer) with its residual attachment to what was understood as liberalism in Australia. Curtin himself led a humble life. It was easy for him to present as an exemplar of the austerity that he was demanding of the public. The reformed drunk with the zeal of a convert. When it came to the pleasures of the people, he would refuse to even treat beer as an essential item. Curtin did attract press criticism, but his clever press secretary Don Rodgers helped ensure that the image of a hard-working and self-sacrificing man of the people and saviour of the nation would circulate widely and influentially initially. There was no change in the thrust of Australia's policy making but within weeks of taking office. However, when the Curtin government faced the most serious crisis of any kind in Australian history after Japan attacked pearl harbor and entered the war on the side of the axis powers things changed.

Most of Australia's forces were fighting war in North Africa, Syria and Europe. Only the eighth division was closer to home. Two brigades had been in Malaya during 1941. Curtin had been mollified by Churchill's decision made against the British prime minister's better judgment to send two first-class warships to Asia. These of course after 10 December 1941 lay at the bottom of the ocean sunk by the Japanese air force. It is easy in the circumstances to see why Churchill should have reacted so adversely when Curtin's new year message calling for greater allied attention to the war in the pacific produced for Melbourne afternoon newspaper was wired sensationally around the world. Curtin had dramatically declared without any inhibitions of any kind "I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom". It's these words that would be long recalled inflated and misrepresented by some commentators and in collective memory as the moment when Australia switched great and powerful friends. Moving from a British orbit to an American one. There would be further offence of course taken in late January 1942 when a cable from Curtin almost certainly drafted by his external affairs minister Herbert Evatt told Churchill that Australians would regard the evacuation of Singapore by Britain as an inexcusable betrayal. Now in an influential popular understanding of 1942 the fall of Singapore itself would become the very betrayal that the cable had warned against. The moment when the British were said to have selfishly abandoned kith and kin and left them to the tender mercies of a ruthless Japanese foe.

Now while many Australians still believe that Churchill opposed bringing Australian troops to the Pacific, he and Curtin of course had agreed that most of them should be returned to meet the Japanese threat but before this could be accomplished by the 15<sup>th</sup> of February when Singapore fell to the Japanese with most of the 8<sup>th</sup> division killed or captured alongside their British and Indian comrades. Many others suffering a similar fate in places to Australia's north in Timor and in Ambon.

The advisory war council<sup>5</sup> without Curtin who was in hospital was meeting in this city (Sydney) and discussed these events on the 19<sup>th</sup> February and of course it was fiery with Curtin in hospital unable to pour oil on the troubled waters there were clashes over Churchill's desire to divert Australian troops to Burma. News that the Japanese had bombed Darwin, which of course you may recall happened that morning arrived during the meeting. The secretary Frederick Shedden later recalled that ministers ran around like a lot of startled chooks. Paul Hasluck's recollection was similar. But in the circumstances alarm was surely understandable. Curtin's position supported by his military advisers and maintained under fairly intense pressure from Churchill and Roosevelt was that the bulk of the troops serving the middle east should come home. Churchill, however, sought to divert the troops toward Burma without Australian ascent<sup>6</sup>. He relented in the face of Curtin's insistence but was so infuriated that he said to have privately exclaimed that Australians came in bad stock; a jibe about the settlers convict origins. Those troops who were not diverted to Java where they would be mainly killed or captured would indeed arrive safely in Fremantle.

Curtin had many an anxious moment as he contemplated the possibility that the transports bringing them home would be sunk and indeed his walking around the grounds of the lodge in Canberra late at night unable to sleep with worry became integral to the Curtin legend of the humane leader and the man of conscience thrust into you know the unfamiliar and uncomfortable uniform of war leadership heroically living with the consequences of his own moral courage. I'm not saying he wasn't wandering around in the dark; but it's a story that was told again and again. Victory seemed a distant prospect on St Patrick's day 1942 when general Douglas MacArthur arrived from the Philippines just ahead of the humiliating surrender of his men. His arrival did, however, boost Australian morale. Curtin's critics have seen in his willingness to leave military matters to MacArthur as a surrender of Australian autonomy. Certainly, a case can be made that Curtin should have been more assertive but the partnership gave Curtin a strong ally, and the Pacific War a strong advocate in Washington.

Meanwhile Curtin was preoccupied with repairing relations with Britain after the unpleasantness of the disagreements around Singapore. We shouldn't make too much of the lingering effect of those differences at least during the war. Australia had left the ninth division to fight in North Africa, it had allowed some of the seventh to provide a garrison in Ceylon now Sri Lanka and of course members of the air force would continue fighting in the bomber offensive over Europe. While the disagreements between the two governments have been elevated in myth and memory into a complete break with empire; the reality even in 1942 was rather different, even Evatt referred to the Australians and British peoples belonging to the same family. Australia wanted and received spitfires from Churchill and its war production depended to some extent on the assistance of British industrial blueprints. Something that's often forgotten when we talk about the industrialisation of Australia. Most Australians still regarded their nation as British. In November 1943 Curtin appointed the brother of King George VI

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<sup>5</sup> The Advisory War Council (1940-1945) was composed of government and opposition politicians (3 each and a secretary) with wartime portfolio responsibilities. The recommendations of this body were almost universally implemented when it came to war related matters.

<sup>6</sup> The troops would have arrived in Rangoon without their heavy weapons (the ships were not combat loaded) just as the Indian and Burmese divisions that made-up Slim's command withdrew through the city.

the Duke of Gloucester as governor general after flirting with the idea of appointing James Scullin the former labour prime minister.

So for all its ambition to be more of a master of its own house the government was unable to gain much say in the conduct of the war, or in shaping the post-war order. Major decisions of course were made at the meetings between the leaders of the great powers minnows such as Australia could be and were safely ignored by the big fish. This mattered less to Australians than that than their growing sense of safety as American troops poured into their cities American ships and planes increasingly commanded the pacific. And of course, their own troops had successes in the lands to the north of Australia particularly by early 1943. The Americans had defeated the Japanese at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands meanwhile Australian troops pushed Japanese forces back over the Owen Stanley ranges to the beaches beyond where MacArthur's Americans joined the fray. The conscripts who served in Papua in 1942 contributed to a legend in which an unusually young force confronted a more numerous enemy and endured the horrors of Kokoda track or trail to save their country from a Japanese invasion. The horror of warfare in Papua, that very difficult terrain and heroism of so many of those servicemen contributed to a sense that in 1942 Australia had begun to stand on its own two feet to defend itself its own country in the face of a challenge to its survival.

Australia's imprint in the world increased dramatically during 1942. In contrast with Menzies in 1939 who'd announced of course that because Great Britain was at war so was Australia; the Curtin government made separate declarations of war on Japan and other Axis powers in 1941 and 1942. Australia signed the Atlantic Charter in January 1942 effectively becoming at that moment a foundation member of the United Nations. In October of the same year Australia finally legislated to adopt the statute of Westminster. Provoked to act some argue by a bizarre case involving both homosexuality and murder on the HMAS Australia; the death sentences passed on to sailors found guilty of a stabbing had exposed a continuing limitation of Australian sovereignty. It was mainly symbolic but the passage of the statute of Westminster placed beyond doubt the legislative independence of the Australian Federal Parliament<sup>7</sup>. Australia also took significant steps in further developing its representation abroad when in October 1941 it opened its first mission in China and a year later when it initiated formal diplomatic relations with another of those great powers the Soviet Union. The Curtin government used this occasion as the pretext for lifting a redundant ban on the communist party of Australia that had been imposed by the Menzies government back in 1940.

In retrospect 1942 was also of great importance to Robert Menzies and the liberal party that he would play a large part in forming and later in leading a series of electoral victories. His "the forgotten people" broadcast of May 1942 would become a foundational statement of values for the liberals in its elevation of the middle class, the family and home, it articulated ideals that would form several pillars of politics and society in the post-war era.

That's the end of what I want to say about politics.

### **Economy**

Considering the economy so during the early months of 1942 the Curtin government drastically increased its control over Australian economic and social life. A new production executive oversaw a massive transfer of resources to war-related production. Ted Theodore formerly a labour politician

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<sup>7</sup> Making 9 October (the date of Viceregal assent) an ideal alternative to 26 January which could continue to be celebrated as "Settlement Day" just like US citizens celebrate "Thanksgiving".

but now a successful businessman was appointed director of an allied works council. Essington Lewis had aircraft production added to his existing responsibilities for munitions.

John Curtin and Ben Chifley relying on the defence power achieved by government regulation a degree of control over the banks. That had never been a serious prospect before. While also of course legislating to take complete control of income tax revenue for the duration of the war. A year afterwards the high court upheld this legislation in a landmark case in 1942; and of course, as I'm sure everyone knows each year around July the states would never resume levying income tax. In a few months as John Edwards has suggested the government had effectively created the monetary and fiscal framework for Australia's post-war social and economic policy. We still live with it today. Post war reconstruction could potentially have been even more ambitious. The Curtin government also in 1942 introduced legislation asking the states to transfer power over a wide range of activities for the war and for five years afterwards. Under the new powers initially proposed, the federal parliament would be able to make any law that in its declared opinion would produce economic security and social justice.

The plans also amounted to a de facto bill of rights. They sought to incorporate FDR, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's four freedoms:

- of speech;
- of worship;
- from want; and
- from fear,

into the Australian constitution. Kinds of things you can slip under the door when there's an emergency on. While the government soon retreated from such far-reaching ambition. Subsequent negotiations with the states stalled and the government of course would unavailingly resort to a referendum in 1944 by which time of course it was too late. The sense of emergency had passed. Possibly as the late Stuart McIntyre indicates "if the government had taken the matter to a popular vote in 42 or early 1943 it could have passed and allowed a much more adventurous pursuit of post-war reconstruction. Although if it would have been a good thing of course depends on your political views.

Fighting the Japanese rather than fighting for socialism was Curtin's priority in 1942 and 1943 and he was a sufficient realist to understand that any suspicion that the government was threatening the future of capitalism could hamper its present war effort. Still Chifley led a new department with responsibility for post-war reconstruction. It was formed in late 1942. He surrounded himself with a young and talented coterie of public servants led by the economist Herbert Cole (HC) "Nugget" Coombs<sup>8</sup> as director general. Coombs and his colleagues began mapping out a post-war order. This doesn't begin late in the war, it begins at this moment in 1942. The period following Japan's entry into the war also saw a truly remarkable period of industrialisation. Australia turned itself into a combination of arsenal and food bowl. I don't have time to explore this in detail today, it's very underappreciated I have to say in both collective memory and in the historiography. But I can evoke a little of the scale of the changes. They had foundations going back to the first world war; soon after which Australia adopted a policy which involved developing defence-related science and industry to increase the country's self-reliance.

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<sup>8</sup> Herbert Cole "Nugget" Coombs was an Australian economist and public servant. He is best known for having been the first Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, in which capacity he served from 1960 to 1968.

They'd never entirely relied on the Singapore strategy. It meant that by 1942 Australia was in a strong position to defend itself and to assist bigger and stronger allies notably the United States. One historian AT Ross believes that Australia's advanced industrial capacity by 1942 saved 40 to 60 thousand lives and helped to discourage a Japanese invasion. General MacArthur did not save Australia he argues, it was saved by the deliberate development of secondary industry through the efforts and policies of industrialists and government. There were mistakes and failures along the way. Aircraft production could have been more effective, and the tank project failed, but the overall story is a remarkable one of industrial development under intense hot house conditions. Australia was producing warplanes of great technical sophistication before it produced a fully locally made motor car. The same could be said of the Sentinel Tank of course, even though the project was abandoned. To take another example the Owen Gun was the product of local ingenuity as well. Lysaght was a British producer of steel metal that set up in Australia with government assistance and protection at the end of the first world war. Capital expenditure by the department of munitions increased from a little over 2 million pounds in 1939-40 to almost 25 million pounds by 1942-43.

The rapid development of capacity in South Australia also illustrates this wider point. The architect of the nation's wartime industrial effort was Essington Lewis a native of the copper town of Borough. He was sympathetic to his home state's claims to a share of war inspired industrialisation under the Liberal Country League Premier Tom Playford. Factories producing munitions sprang up in Adelaide's north west as well as in several towns, an explosives factory at Salisbury near Adelaide would become the basis for the post-war long-range weapons establishment the Woomera rocket range. An Anglo-Australian joint venture with the shipbuilding industry established at Whyalla. These developments laid the foundations for South Australia's defence industries. More generally wartime industrialisation was the basis of Australia's post-war consumer-orientated industrial economy that would employ about three in ten workers by the end of the 1950s.

### **Indigenous People**

Indigenous people too were involved in this broad collective effort. A thousand or so probably had managed to negotiate their way around the barriers to enlistment in the first world war. In the second world war more like three to four thousand served in a branch of the armed and auxiliary forces. That was despite the continuation of formal prohibitions on the enlistment of indigenous people in the army in the early part of the war. The air force was more liberal in a country that had adopted and developed the link between citizenship and military service into a kind of concept of an Anzac citizen. Indigenous service readily became the basis for claims to citizenship rights as the Japanese threat intensified during 1942. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were brought directly into the war effort in greater numbers. Some worked as labourers in the civil construction corps others joined special aboriginal units set up for reconnaissance, coast watching and guerrilla warfare. Torres Strait Islanders were formed into an infantry battalion to support coastal artillery.

Edmund Barton many years before had spoken of a nation for a continent. But the federal Commonwealth that he helped create had made a very light imprint on much of Australia's north. In its first 40 years in a country that prided itself on its egalitarian democracy and living standards, aboriginal workers of northern Australia usually lacked voting rights, often received rations rather than wages, and were forced to endure the paternalism and sometimes the brutality of employers, police, missionaries, and administrators. The pacific war unsettled when it did not destroy these patterns. The withdrawal of white labour from many occupations opened new opportunities for indigenous workers many of whom received wages in cash for the first time.

The federal government's vast investment in the defence of northern Australia brought that region and its people both indigenous and non-indigenous more securely more surely into the national economic mainstream. Many white Australians from the south who might not otherwise have had dealings with aboriginal people encountered them when serving in northern Australia. A young air force navigator in from Sydney named Gough Whitlam among them. In a country whose political system had seen fit to exclude indigenous people it was becoming easier by 1945 at any rate if not 1942 for many settler-Australians to imagine aboriginal people as fully fledged citizens.

## **Culture**

Culture, my last point. Now I can do no more than hint at the cultural dynamism that the war helped unleash. The major incidents are well known. there's the Ern Malley affair when a couple of young soldiers and poets from Melbourne, James McCauley and Harold Stewart invented a deceased poet named Ern Malley and his sister Ethel. They wrote a collection of modernist poems which they then used to deceive the young fiery editor of literary magazine Angry Penguins, Max Harris. Of course, they ultimately pranked themselves, they created a legend and verse that has lived on. No one warned that the mind repeats in its ignorance the vision of others. I am still the black swan of trespass on alien waters, it's haunting. There is the William Dobell case when that artist won the Archibald prize for his portrait of fellow artist Joshua Smith only then to face the accusation and a court challenge claiming that he'd really produced a caricature that should have been ineligible. You can look up the particular painting on the web if you've never seen the painting itself. I don't think survived it was burnt I think but there are images of it, you can decide whether you think it was portrait or caricature. There are the Angry Penguin artists Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker, Sydney Nolan, Joy Hester and other artists of the period Russell Drysdale, Nile Coonahan. Taken together I'd suggest representing the most influential engagement with Australian landscape, the people and a notion I guess of a national soul since the Heidelberg school of the 1880s and 1890s. I mean Nolan's Ned Kelly series became among the most internationally recognisable images of Australia certainly in the visual arts. Perhaps more generally too it's surprising to me when I was living in London how recognisable that is, certainly to many erudite educated British. It's often for that reason chosen as the cover for Australian books, books on Australian history.

There were the novelists such as Elena Dark producing the timeless land trilogy of early Australia beginning in 1941 with its new sensibilities about relations between settlers and aboriginal people. The rediscovery of the literature of the 1890s of Henry Lawson, of Joseph Furphy, a lot of material released in cheap editions that could be readily bought during the war particularly by soldiers. John Curtin opened his famous article in the Melbourne Herald, the appeal to America with lines of verse from Bernard O'Dowd's poem Dawnwood from 1903. O'Dowd himself was working in wartime censorship.

The Australian communist party in the most nationalistic phase of its existence was at the forefront of these efforts to reinvigorate a sense of Australia as having a distinctive national culture. It called its youth wing the Eureka Youth League it sponsored a wide range of cultural activities museum exhibits painting and so on.

Literature there was a folk revival that would live on into the 1950s as well as an insurgent interest in Australian history that the British filmmaker Ealing Studios recognised with 1940s classics such as the Overlanders made during the war released, I think shortly after it, and Eureka Stockade always of course starring Chips Rafferty. Eureka Stockade was even enjoyed (as revealed by Australian diplomatic documents) by the leader of communist Yugoslavia Marshall Tito.



Manning Clark would teach the first freestanding university course in Australian history at the university of Melbourne in 1946. The beginning of course of his articulation of a distinctive vision of the Australian past that would find expression in his sixth volume history of Australia

So to conclude did all of this come out of 1942? No of course not, there were precursors, there were outgrowths, but I think we can see those frantic months of early 1942 as the progenitor of much of what we now think of as marking Australian national life. Many Australians paid a high price of course for that accomplishment or achievement. If we want to see it in those terms, one consequence of the fall of Singapore was that thousands of Australians entered captivity. That though is another marker of the cultural significance of 1942. During the 1980s the experiences of that group of men gained an ascendancy in the business of how Australians remembered the second world war; perhaps even Australians at war in general. Their wartime suffering their post-war legacy of trauma became in many ways the quintessential second world war experience. Indeed, in war memory more generally it arguably even began to overshadow its major competitors, the Gallipoli landing, the Australian victories in France in 1918 and maybe even the Kokoda campaign. In this way too 1942 has made us who we are.