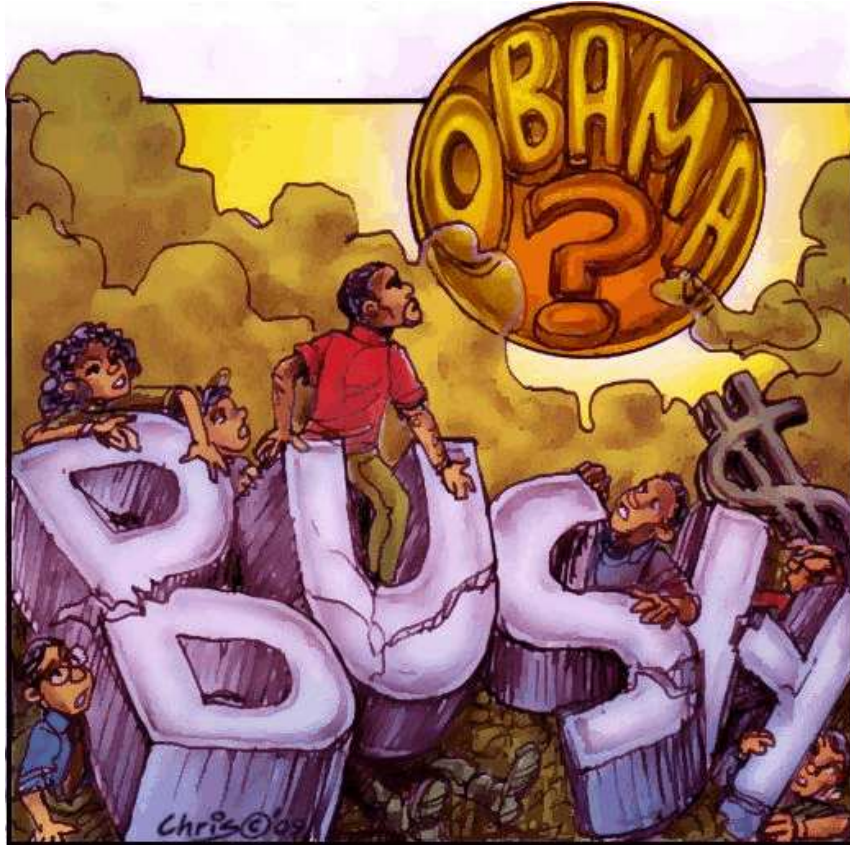


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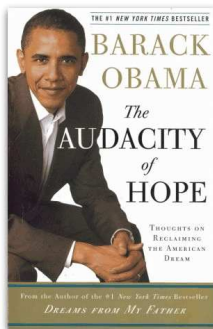
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Obama vs the 'ethic of greed'

BOOKS

Bruce Duncan

Obama, Barack: *The Audacity of Hope*. Text Publishing Co., 2008. ISBN: 9781921351365



President Barack Obama has sketched a vision of social renewal in the United States. It overlaps very closely in many areas with Catholic and more broadly Christian social thought. In his 2006 book, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, he stresses the notions of the common good, of social justice and of equality of opportunity, along with individual responsibility.

Few US presidents have revealed so much before their election about their own personal lives and aspirations for social change as has President Barack Hussein Obama. His *Audacity of Hope* is an extraordinary account of how he has thought through many of the negative aspects of American public life and policies, especially of race and inequality, and what needs to be done to renew and change America for the better.

This book complements his earlier more personal account of his life and struggles in *Dreams of My Father*. But it focuses much more on public policy issues. Writing clearly and powerfully, Obama sketches a moral vision of the future, and calls on the US to recommit itself to 'a set of ideals that continue to stir our collective conscience; a common set of values that bind us together despite our differences'.

Obama is of course appalled by past racism, but also by the failure of the Bush Administration to address social inequality and the entrenched poverty of many working class Americans and immigrants. He laments the redistribution of wealth to the financial elites, as well as the reckless adventurism and deceit in the Iraq war.

Americans, he writes, 'are weary of the dead zone that politics has become, in which narrow interests vie for advantage and ideological minorities seek to impose their own versions of absolute truth'.

He writes with passion: 'I am angry about policies that consistently favour the wealthy and powerful over average Americans, and insist that government has an important role in opening up opportunity to all. I believe in evolution, scientific inquiry and global warming.'

Even before the financial meltdown, Obama denounced the 'ethic of greed' and materialism in US culture, and their effects on government, finance and public policy. 'In 1960, the average CEO made 42 times what an average hourly worker took home. By 2005, the ratio was 262 to 1. Between 1971 and 2001, average workers received no gain in incomes, while the income of

the top hundredth of a percent went up almost 500 per cent.

But Obama is also a pragmatist, schooled as he has been as a community worker in the South Side of Chicago, trying to reconcile opposed groups and to come to solutions that will work. He brings this emphasis into national politics, trying to rise above party-political factionalism and build a wide consensus, so 'we can ground our politics in the notion of the common good'. This is a key phrase for Obama.

He is resolute in seeking a major change of direction in US policies, including in the economic area, and in seeking to rein in the excesses of laissez-faire, neo-liberal ideological views. 'There is the absolutism of the free market, an ideology of no taxes, no regulation, no safety net — indeed, no government beyond what's required to protect private property and provide for the national defence.'

Instead he calls for careful government regulation to ensure that markets and fiscal discipline help promote social justice.

His chapter on values reminds Americans that their 'individualism has always been bound by a set of communal values, the glue upon which every healthy society depends. We value the imperatives of family and the cross-generational obligations that family implies.' He argues that the Golden Rule is not just a call to charity, but 'a call to stand in somebody else's shoes and see through their eyes'.

Obama embraced Christianity because of his involvement with church groups, animating community renewal and sustaining the moral vision of oppressed blacks in particular. Yet he recognises that people of good will may disagree on key issues, such as abortion. He asks that 'proposals must be subject to argument and amenable to reason', and not advanced simply as religious imperatives.

Obama wants to be as inclusive of marginalised groups as he can, including gays and racial minorities, along with people without religious allegiance. His chapter on race is not hectoring, but is based on finely nuanced reflection on his own life and experience. This is so also true of his chapter on family.

The chapter, 'The world beyond our borders', argues for a more multilateral engagement with the rest of the world in addressing the urgent issues of peacemaking, global warming, hunger and poverty.

Obama has thought through many of these themes with great care, and articulated them cogently in hundreds of speeches. No wonder he seems so much at ease in his major speeches, and that he writes many key speeches himself, or even speaks off-the-cuff.

Obama has become president at a most difficult time. But it is also a moment of opportunity. Many Americans have been shocked at the consequences of the policies of the neo-conservatives; other Americans are demanding a major renewal of their values and

institutions. The renewal must include more astute regulation of markets to ensure that they serve the common good, not just of all Americans, but of the world.

It is also an unprecedented moment for people inspired by Christian social traditions to engage in the conversation about making deep changes for the better.

Why Aussie politicians should learn to party

POLITICS

John Warhurst

The inauguration of Barack Obama as US President transfixed Australians. Some even travelled to Washington to be part of the occasion. A much larger number got up in the middle of the night to watch the ceremonies on television.



The four days included official constitutional ceremonies, like the swearing in, public speeches, street parties and more formal celebrations like the ten presidential balls.

The serious purpose of pomp and ceremony and partying like this is often underrated. The occasion connects government more closely to the people in a public and often emotional way.

Yet if Obama had been sworn in, Australian-style, the ceremonies would have been very different, the occasion held in private and the audience much smaller. The Prime Minister and the members of the new government would have been sworn in by the Governor-General at her official residence in Yarralumla before a small group of family and friends. A smallish morning tea party would follow.

The next day a formal photograph to commemorate the occasion would appear in the media.

Much earlier than that, soon after the election, the new PM would have flown to Canberra and started to work. A small crowd, mostly of officials, supplemented by some keen onlookers, would have greeted the new prime minister at Fairbairn Airport.

Later, at the first sitting of the new parliament, the Governor-General would declare parliament open and read the official speech on behalf of her government. All of this is done inside the building, before an audience mainly made up of relatives, friends, staffers and parliamentary officials.

The common Australian response is that public ceremonies like the inauguration are uniquely American. Yet that is not true.

Last February there was a great display of public joy and affection when Kevin Rudd apologised to the Stolen Generations. Older Australians remember royal tours as providing a similar sort of public display. ANZAC Day ceremonies and this week's Australia Day celebrations still provide it.

Australians are not that different from Americans. They are just given fewer occasions and opportunities to display their joy. The decline of the monarchy in Australia has removed one set of opportunities, because too few people believe in it any more.

Any explanation that relies on cultural differences between the USA and Australia is unconvincing. The more relevant difference between the USA and Australia is institutional. Obama is Head of State and Head of Government all wrapped into one office and one person. Australians have a parliamentary democracy represented by three official personages: the Queen, the Governor-General and the Prime Minister.

Furthermore, not only is the Governor-General not elected, but the appointment is made by the Queen on the Prime Minister's recommendation. This process is hardly transparent. Similarly, the Prime Minister is not personally elected to the top job, but is chosen by the caucus of the winning party. Even Kevin07 can't be expected to generate the same level of personal support as a US President.

These factors pose genuine difficulties for Australian-style ceremonies. Nevertheless there are possibilities.

Let's put the Queen aside because she's too far removed to be useful. But she does provide ceremonial opportunities for the British in Britain. If Australia becomes a republic with one of its own as President, the pomp and ceremony could be replicated in Australia in our own way.

In the case of both the Prime Minister and the Governor-General there is more that could be done.

Official functions that at present are held indoors and in semi-private, either in Yarralumla or in Parliament House, should be expanded to allow greater public involvement. They should be transferred to a more public venue, or opened up to include a public aspect attached to the official requirements.

Additionally, greater effort should be made to recognise public needs in constructing occasions for governments to connect with people, such as a keys to the city ceremony for an incoming government. And why not have an official public welcome for both new Governors-General and new Prime Ministers?

Allowing and encouraging greater public engagement with such occasions would enable Australians en masse to connect with the office and to celebrate Australian democracy and national identity.

Dodson honour deflects neoliberal orthodoxy

INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Myrna Tonkinson



From day one, the selection of Professor Mick Dodson as Australian of the Year 2009 sparked controversy. His remarks about the observance of Australia Day, and his call for a rethink of the choice of 26 January as Australia's national day (as that date is seen by many Indigenous Australians as marking an invasion), are emblematic of his style, and indicative of what is in store for his tenure.

The Prime Minister's response was immediate and negative, but Dodson was not deterred. He reaffirmed that this should be a matter for discussion, and promised to engage the public in this and other topics — probably including the issue of compensation to members of the Stolen Generations, and changes to the Constitution to recognise the Indigenous people's prior sovereignty over the land that is now Australia.

Mick Dodson has an exceptional record of service and leadership as an advocate for human rights, especially for full rights of citizenship and genuine equality for Australia's Indigenous people. We can be confident that, like some earlier appointments, such as Fiona Stanley and Tim Flannery, he will not shrink from challenging government on policies and stances with which he takes issue.

It is commendable that the Government was willing to accord him the high profile this honour bestows in the current political climate, where there is great pressure for Indigenous people to change radically, in accordance with the dictates of neo-liberalism.

The responses of Tony Abbott and some Aboriginal leaders exemplify the fact that many now see the focus on rights as passé, and entrepreneurship and 'responsibility' as paramount — as though these are mutually exclusive categories.

On matters such as the Northern Territory Intervention, and the conversion of communal lands to freehold title to facilitate private home ownership, Mick Dodson has been a strong voice in favour of human rights, and of caution and scepticism in the face of pressure to abandon Aboriginal distinctiveness. While acknowledging the need for change, he has avoided the blame-the-victim tone of some Indigenous leaders.

Surprisingly, some observers seem disappointed that Professor Dodson is already a well known Australian. With characteristic humility, he himself spoke of his reluctance to accept the distinction, noting that many other Australians are more deserving — a reminder that many others toil in the same fields, unacknowledged.

Yet there is no doubt that Professor Dodson, with his intellect, knowledge, experience,

equable temperament, and eloquence, will be an exceptional Australian of the Year. His background in public life and his familiarity with the media allow him to hit the ground running, as his remarks on the national day have shown.

I expect he will judiciously apply his incisive analytical skills and his persistent advocacy towards goals for which he has long striven. He is a model of a successful professional who has chosen to dedicate his considerable talents to service, when he could undoubtedly have had a more comfortable existence pursuing a career in the private sector.

His role as a mentor and facilitator of young people through the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre is just one of the ways Dodson shares his skill and knowledge.

This is not the place to list his accomplishments, but Mick Dodson's track record is dazzling, with more than three decades of leadership and service. He has represented Australia's Indigenous people in UN forums for many years, and at home has been on the frontline in examining and commenting upon their conditions and ways to address inequality and disadvantage.

His role in the Stolen Generations Royal Commission is particularly noteworthy. Although vilified in some quarters, the report of the Commission brought new levels of awareness of ugly aspects of the history of Australia's dealings with its Indigenous people.

Professor Dodson's own obvious distress at some of the heart-rending accounts of broken lives and remarkable resilience was significant in conveying to many Australians the depth of wounds that must be recognised and treated — a task that is far from complete.

I consider Mick Dodson among the most effective public voices in Australia. Deeply thoughtful and balanced in his assessments, he commands attention and respect because he also remains open to the opinions of others, and is ready to be persuaded by a good argument.

Dodson's speeches and interviews are always memorable. His style is not rousing, rather, his utterances are deliberate and thoughtful. He speaks truth to power with courage and passion, with vehemence untainted by venom.

Perhaps most memorable was the speech he gave at the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's Corroboree 2000, at the Sydney Opera House. He gave an account of aspects of his and his family's experiences as Aboriginal people, and contrasted their situation with then Prime Minister John Howard's at comparable stages of his life.

The profundity of the gulf could not have been clearer. It was a masterful way to shed light on the difference 'race' and, more to the point, racism, has made to people's experience of Australia.

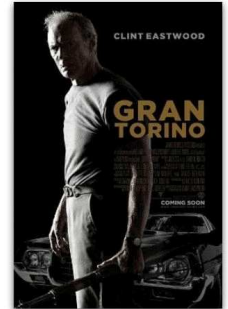
I am confident we shall have many more memorable speeches and challenging observations as this year progresses.

Redeeming the all-American racist

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

Gran Torino: 116 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Clint Eastwood. Starring: Clint Eastwood, Christopher Carley, Bee Vang, Ahney Her, Brian Haley, John Carroll Lynch



A more or less straight line could be drawn between actor/director Clint Eastwood's starring roles in revisionist western *Unforgiven*, boxing fable *Million Dollar Baby* and, now, suburban race drama *Gran Torino*. This rogues gallery of Eastwood's latter career comprises antiheroes grappling their way to atonement and redemption for sins past.

The most recent is Walt, *Gran Torino's* all-American neighbourhood racist; a gun-toting, flag-waving Korean War vet, who passes his days guzzling beer on the front porch of his middle American suburban home, spewing xenophobic slander, most notably towards the 'zipperhead' Hmong refugee family that lives next door.

To be fair, Walt appears to dislike everybody, regardless of their skin colour. His adult sons and their families — whose good humour at Walt's incessantly ill manner, even at his own wife's funeral, has worn thin — would pay testament to that.

Same goes for Father Janovich (Carley), the good natured young priest charged by Walt's late wife with trying to redeem the crotchety widower. Walt is resistant to the priest's well-meant platitudes, and dismisses the man as an 'overeducated 27-year-old virgin' who gets his kicks out of promising eternal life to 'superstitious old ladies'.

Unexpectedly, *Gran Torino* (which takes its title from Walt's most prized possession, the all-American's all-American car) is very funny. Walt's frequent racist remarks are cause for amusement, once you accept that they are the result of his own neurosis. So exaggerated and unfounded are his prejudices that Walt becomes a send-up of himself.

The truth is, with Walt, it's all a matter of knowing how to talk to him. The film juxtaposes the exasperated failure of Walt's son Mitch (Haley) to communicate with the old man, with Walt's good-naturedly abusive relationship with his barber Martin (Lynch). Walt, it seems, respects those who can give as good as they get.

So an unlikely friendship emerges between Walt and two Hmong teenagers who live next door. Sue (Her) quips quick-fire comebacks to any slander Walt can dish out, and wears down his gruff resolve. Her brother, Thao (Vang), grows on him too; soon enough Walt takes the boy under his wing, mentoring him and helping him to find work.

Cultural pressures weigh heavily in the teens' lives. Walt learns that there is a truism among the refugee community, that the women go to 'college' and the men go to jail. Sure enough, Thao is under pressure from a local gang to surrender to the stereotype.

For Thao, the threat of violence is constant. This sets Walt, and the plot of *Gran Torino*, on a self-consciously messianic course. The film's inevitably tragic finale is not as ambiguous as the ethically hazy climax to Eastwood's previous actor/director vehicle, *Million Dollar Baby*. Yet, paradoxically, it is less fulfilling in its heavy-handedness.

Walt's redemption, after all, takes place in the everyday course of his life: his grudging, growing respect for the priest; his bond with Sue and Thao, and his understanding of the cultural and social factors bearing on their lives; his realisation that he is as alien to his neighbours, as they are to him — a trite lesson, but warmly and humorously evoked by the film. These resonate more loudly than any overwrought messianic symbolism.

Ethics of a hoax

MEDIA

Andrew Hamilton



The *Quadrant* hoax was a small story by world standards. But for small magazines it was the big story of the new year. It also raised intriguing questions about how to respond to it, and indeed about ethical response more generally.

Like others, I had a variety of responses. On first reading how the *Quadrant* editor was deceived into publishing a spurious article, I laughed. This was a classical sting, in which an editor and magazine that sternly criticise others for being intellectually indiscriminating, were proved to be less than discriminating.

My laughter, however, turned into sympathy, and even to apprehension. There but for the grace of God went I. As both potential victim and potential perpetrator. Like anyone who assesses the merits of articles submitted for publication, I recognised how fallible are my judgments, and how vulnerable *Eureka Street* would be to a high class sting.

I also confess being tempted to similar hoaxes. When annoyed by journals, particularly church magazines that dress up a harsh ideology in a facade of intellectual seriousness, I idly imagine myself submitting pseudonymously an article advocating the brutal church order congenial to the magazine.

It might be supported by quotations from Stalin's speeches, attributed to an undeservedly unknown Eastern European theologian.

But the lesser graces of laziness and prudence have so far held me back, and saved me from the embarrassment of disclosure.

Laughter, sympathy and apprehension led me eventually to ask what to make of the hoax. Was it appropriate to laugh? Should I chastise myself for dallying with fantasies of hoaxing? After all, the intellectual enterprise to which small magazines contribute relies on trust. It would collapse if we could not trust that writers generally mean what they say, and are who they say.

And do not hoaxes contain an element of cruelty? They are designed to humiliate editors and discredit their enterprise. Can truth be commended or defended by such methods, particularly when the author of the hoax remains unknown?

With these questions we have left laughter behind and moved into serious ethical mode. Ethics, of course, is conventionally done with prune faces and laser lips. It is about judging. Judges who award black and white hats have no business laughing. It is important to be

earnest.

Or is it? When doing ethics, even the ethics of hoaxes, it may be important not to be earnest. To appreciate the full human reality of hoaxes, we need to be playful and enjoy unreflectively the human comedy.

Hoaxes do not inhabit the ideal world of reasonable human beings in serious conversation. They dwell in the gaps — the gap between human intentions and what results from them, between the great pride we take in our achievements or our virtue and the tiny reality of both, between the ideal case and the possibilities that the resourceful can exploit.

A humane ethics has to encompass picaresque stories of human interaction and not simply abstract questions.

One of Jesus' stories poses the same question of the relationship between laughter and ethics. In Christian faith Jesus is a model of ethical judgment and conduct. This could lead us to conclude that he must be earnest.

But then we read his story of a dodgy manager who learns that he is to be sacked. So he cooks his master's accounts, arranging with his debtors to halve what they owe. He reasons that they will be so grateful that they will offer him employment. On discovering the fraud his master praises his smartness. Jesus then says that his followers should be equally shrewd in their dealings with the world.

Christian scholars, especially those who reverence property rights, have found it puzzling that Jesus and the master in his story should be so taken with the steward and so uncritical of his fraud. The problem disappears if you assume that in Jesus a lively enjoyment of the human comedy coexists with a strong moral sense.

He is serious but not earnest. Or better, the condition of his seriousness is a lack of earnestness. Some would say that this is also a condition of indiscriminating love.

The *Quadrant* hoax and our response to it do prompt serious questions about the conditions under which public intellectual conversation flourishes. But it is also another rich detail on the luxuriant human tapestry. It is humorous. Compared to the wounds caused this new year by phosphorous shells and the like, the scars of being remembered as the editor or magazine that was hoaxed are superficial.

But the editorial staff of small magazines this year will keep a wary eye on unsolicited articles.

The persistence of memory

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras

'You must be mad,' declared my brother when I announced my intention of attending a school reunion. I grinned and said maybe, while reflecting that this business was not even a case of Forty Years On, but more like 50.



Many people have dark thoughts about the wastefulness and futility of nostalgia, but I do not share them. Perhaps this is what happens when your life is sliced in two by migration, as mine was long ago. Today I live in Greece, but the reunion was to take place in the country of my youth, Australia.

We die many deaths in life; migration demands a death of at least one old self. The death paradoxically involves the process of living, because the migrant simply has to keep on functioning. The grief involved in migration is often intense and prolonged, but settles into a kind of remembering that never entirely loses an edge of pain.

I walked in the door of the reunion venue; immediately the organiser rushed over, wrapped me in enthusiastic embrace, and said, 'I know who you are; you haven't changed at all.' Her warmth was a tonic, but I wondered. Of course I've changed. I had to. We all have to, even if we cling to vestiges of our past selves and lives for comfort.

In a sense, perhaps, our old lives and selves do not quite die, but are like rose bushes that undergo regular shaping and trimming, and sometimes quite hard pruning.

My dad, now old and frail, had been a teacher at the school. He taught me, as well as many others who attended the reunion. They talked about him with fondness and admiration, for he had been a vibrant and entertaining presence, a sound and effective communicator, a person who connected with others. 'I don't remember all my teachers,' someone told me, 'but I remember him. He was one of the ones who made a difference.'

Some teachers make a difference. So do some people. And so it was that one old friend arranged to take me bush-walking.

Me and my landscapes. I am used to walking in the foothills of the Taygetus Mountains in the Peloponnese, where I have views of key-hole caves on the one hand and the silver-flash green of the olive groves on the other. But these things are the top-soil layers of memory; the Australian bush is the bed-rock. The spindly trees, the sunburnt, drought-stricken scrub, the posts and rails and barbed wire. All these sights are achingly familiar.

In one sense I feel I am walking through a Hans Heysen, Stretton or McCubbin landscape. When I am away, my mind's eye needs only to blink and I am back among the eucalypts and

tea-tree.

The mind's nose is not as obedient, but as the bush scents drift, I suddenly remember other ones: the aroma of fish and chips floating along the platforms at Flinders Street Station, the smell of dust that always, in Victoria, heralds a storm, as moisture suddenly hits bone-dry earth.

Snatches of song have the same effect: just a few bars of 'The Rose of Tralee' take me back to times when my mother, sister and I sang ancestral songs round the piano. Now my mother and sister are no more, but my three-quarters Greek grandson has been able to recognise 'Waltzing Matilda' since he was 20 months old.

I pondered many things as I tramped through the bush towards the sea. The comfort of old friends and the shorthand of conversation effortlessly resumed, the giving up of oneself to healing Nature, the restorative joy that can be taken in the here and now, the precious moment.

And I remembered that it had been my father who introduced me and my classmates to Wordsworth and his notion of endless nature rolling through all things.

The graft took: my friend read a poem out there, miles from anywhere. And I listened, feeling at home once more: I had returned to my native land and to my mother tongue, even if only for a short time.

But at the day's close it was not Wordsworth I thought of so much as E. M. Forster: Only connect.

How lax commentary is failing cricket

SPORT

Tony Smith



During the cricket series between Australia and the visiting South Africans, commentators frequently referred to a 'crisis' in Test cricket. Gazing around the grounds at what they considered to be smallish attendances, some commentators suggested that people were spurning the game in its 'purest form', represented by five-day Test matches between national elevens.

Such comments suggest that the radio, television and press experts have priorities that are at least short-sighted and perhaps even cynically commercial.

Some commentators seemed anxious to get the Tests over so that the popular 'forms of the game' could proceed. This attitude is offensive to the dedicated fan of cricket. These other 'forms' — the 'one-dayers' and Twenty20 matches are not 'other forms' but quite distinct and different games.

The late, great 'Tiger' Bill O'Reilly, champion leg-spinner, had little respect for games limited to 50 overs per side, so he would probably turn in his grave to learn of the even shorter version.

O'Reilly said Test cricketers should be spared the indignity of playing limited overs games — what the commentators today describe as 'adapting'. O'Reilly thought that if spectators were excited by quick slogging, it would be preferable to invite a couple of teams from the wheat belt areas to the city. These bushies would have great strength in their upper bodies and would be accustomed to playing on hard, fast, bouncy pitches.

In all probability, O'Reilly would see the arrival of Twenty20 as an attempt to make the 50-50 one-dayers look sophisticated. He would certainly feel vindicated by the way in which some players who have had no first-class experience can dominate Twenty20 matches.

And just because crowds might be entertained by such games does not mean that already overworked Test players need take part. That they do participate currently has more to do with the demands of advertisers, who must have identifiable heroes to associate with their products. The commercial imperatives of the summer and the staging of Twenty20 games threaten the dignity of Test players by treating them as junior sales personnel.

During the Tests, commentators were preoccupied with the likelihood of one senior batsman continuing in the Australian side. Eventually, Matthew Hayden announced his retirement as a Test player, but only after he was omitted from the one-day and Twenty20 teams.

It is strange that commentators ignore the evidence of the advertisements. When a player's star is on the rise, he is in demand for advertising. When it is waning and he is not considered saleable, he quickly falls from favour with administrators and selectors as well.

Perhaps the commentators are afraid that if they acknowledge such influences in cricket, they will be reclassified as finance journalists. To their credit, the television lads openly embrace their roles as salesmen of memorabilia and viewing time.

That Australia did not win the home series against the Proteas does not mean that Test cricket is in crisis or that the standard of Australian cricket is necessarily slipping. The South Africans had a resilient spirit and played exciting cricket. It is unfortunate that commentators took their eyes off the ball so often that some rare cricketing feats were not placed into historical perspective.

Some commentators did not seem overly concerned to research the records. In the Sydney Test for example, two players made their debuts for Australia and the Australian bowlers included two left arm quicks. Commentators should have been able to indicate whether such occurrences were unique, rare or common. If there were other instances, it would be interesting to know when these occurred and who was involved.

Commentators performed just as badly during the Melbourne Test regarding the record partnership by J. P. Duminy and Dale Steyn, and Steyn's remarkable all-round double of ten wickets and a half century.

The Duminy/Steyn effort was acknowledged in the world context, but no mention was made of the partnership passing records by South Africans anywhere, in Tests in Australia and at the MCG. Nor were parallel records for all national teams or for Australian players forthcoming.

While this list might seem to produce a mass of statistics, it is informative to hear which players have held records previously and how long these have stood. Ignorance of cricket history means ignorance of Test cricket traditions and ignorance encourages homogenisation with other games such as one-dayers and Twenty20.

The unveiling of a sculpture of famous barracker 'Yabba' speaks not only of a time when the SCG had a 'hill' for spectators, but also is a reminder of a time when grounds were relatively silent. Today crowds are subjected to all sorts of unwanted noise, and have little option but to talk when they ought to be quiet. The traditional, courteous hush during the fast bowler's approach has been eliminated, yet such developments receive no comment.

Like cricketers, commentators can lose a sense of their responsibilities. They seldom serve the game and barely serve the public. When Alan McGilvray was commentating, he created a word picture of the scene in the middle of the ground. He described the weather and the field setting at least once an over and gave the name of bowler, batsman and fieldsman every ball.

Today's commentators seem determined to speak about anything but the cricket. Their lunches, last night's frivolities, films and politics all feature strongly but their favourite subject is themselves. Perhaps they compete for commentators' records, such as the longest period spent without mentioning the names of the bowler or batsman in a first class match at the SCG, or the most uses of passive voice in a single session anywhere.

Their comments certainly reflect a degree of uncertainty about what the commercially minded administrators might want next.

Much more than the Australian players, the Test cricket commentators are in crisis. They would serve the game better by regaining their dignity and would do this best by concentrating on the marvellous Test cricket they are privileged to witness.

Maori for cannibal

POETRY

Jennifer Compton

Kaitangata

I was Writer in Residence at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch.
Had a relationship that wasn't going all that well with a man from Kaitangata.
Seemed like a good idea to go down there and meet some of his folks. Well.
It was certainly fascinating. I have never felt so out of place. And yet. And yet.
Kai (food) tangata (people) is Maori for cannibal. People are food, as it were.
There was a custom for Maori warriors to eat the enemy they killed in battle.
This was called long pig because it tastes like pork but the bones are longer.
Kaitangata is famous for the mine disaster in 1879. 30 men and boys died.

Otago

Kaitangata is 6 k from the Clutha river and 15 minutes drive from Balclutha.
As we drove south in the orange kombi (yes! he had done the Katmandu trail!)
the country got harsher and tougher. I was looking about me at the visible signs
of a country that I hadn't been in before. Erosion. Tussock. Hawks wheeling.
He motored on looking neither to the left or right. He knew it all backwards.
We stayed with his sister and brother-in-law. They made us really welcome.
But he dumped me there and vanished. Don't know where. Do know why.
So I just made the best of it. I have never drunk so many cups of tea.

Local Customs

For some reason people thought the rules that governed mines
back in the old country didn't count here. They were sadly mistaken.
Black damp, choke damp and fire damp were just as lethal in NZ.
And a naked flame was just plain stupid.

In many ways this was like Gallipoli was to Australia.

But because it was NZ it went deep underground. And dwelt there.

The town feels it and lives by it.

The mine closed in recent years and they commuted to Balclutha
and the abbatoirs and became freezing workers.

It's tough on the killing floor, but at least it is not underground.

His mother had begged him (her youngest) not to go down the mine.

He was apprenticed to an electrician and went down the mine.

His story of hearing an earthquake rolling in towards him
through the walls of the earth was breath taking.

Then he went to the university in Christchurch and learned Russian.

Hoo Boy!

The brother-in-law, one of nature's gentlemen, invited me to the pub.

It seemed like a good idea. And I have been to pubs before.

But this pub was one huge open space, as big as a rugby field.

The barmen were working like donkeys dishing out the beer.

It took them a split second to sort out my brandy, lime and soda.
But they dished that out to me. Once they had taken it on board.

He turned up for a minute and said he had people to see. Of course.

I had brought him to a town where he always would have unfinished business.

I glanced at the b-in-law and saw a woman who was not his wife was sitting
next to him — in his aura! — and realised that he was having an affair with her.

The whole town lived underground or on the killing floor, the drama was
played out all around me in the pub that was at least as big as a rugby field.

Nothing — and yet ...!

He had told me when his sister made jam she never pitted and hulled the fruit.

So her jam was — phhht! phhht!

I noticed the tea I drank so much of had the taste and texture of old pennies.

Everyone was wearing woollen jerseys — it was bloody cold, I shivered.
But the knits looked like they had been well and truly boiled in the copper.
We went to his brother's house for dinner. Everything that opened and shut.
The latest toys. The newest most garish axminster that money could buy.
The newest wall paper that clashed with the axminster that money could buy.
These people had money. As they sprawled about in their well-boiled woollies.
We eat crayfish, oysters, the fat of the land. (Maybe I mean the fat of the sea.)
What the brother hadn't caught himself he had bought for negligible amounts.
I was irresistably reminded of *Memoirs Of A Peon* by Frank Sargeson.
'Just because you have money doesn't mean you are not still a peasant.'
I was the daughter of a peasant and I either went with it or went against it.
But I had learned not to like seafood. Since I had seen my mother
cramming an urgently spiralling crayfish into a pot of boiling water.

Sometimes I just love nothing

The next day I walked down to a beach and gazed out upon —
absolutely nothing.

The next stop — the Antarctic.

Perfect and infinitely desirable emptiness. Purity.

Blue Eyes!

He had the coldest, bluest, most thrilling eyes I had ever seen.

I often asked him where he had got his eyes from.

I met one of his brothers. The same cold blue eyes.

He told me that there had been a primary school teacher in town who had left
a few Midwich cuckoos behind. With ice blue eyes. His brother and himself,
the two youngest, were probably, almost certainly, spawned by the teacher.

And you saw the same eyes, here and there, in the most unexpected places.

When I was googling I found a laconic web site for the town.

What amused me was it laconically intimated that the centre of the town's social life was the primary school.

All that jazz

BOOKS

Grant Fraser

Like jazz itself, *Extempore* is intelligent, collaborative and inclusive, yet contains that intensity of vision which we associate with the best artists, both creative and interpretive. In format it consists of eight interviews, a number of essays, short stories, poetry, reviews and graphics. It also comes with a bonus CD featuring some of Australia's finest and most innovative musicians.

To an outsider, jazz might seem a mysterious, prowling place because it has always defied simple definition, although most people try. Here, Paul Grabowsky thinks of it as both noun and adverb; Sacha Feinstein hears it in the voice of Paul Scofield reading the poetry of T. S. Eliot; Phil Treloar calls it 'collective autonomy'. However we might define it, the music seems to be more about possibilities than probabilities, about risk rather than certainty.

The interviews are a strength: thoughtful, intelligent, slow elaborations. The people interviewed take nothing for granted and seem to share a refreshing delight in what they do.

I particularly liked the interview with Sandy Evans. It is clear that she is intelligent, accomplished and wise, untroubled by the pantheon and the shadows of American giants. She speaks of how she found in jazz her own musical homeland, her own distinctive voice: 'I've got to become strong in this language; until then it's just shopping'. There is a sense with Evans, as with Tony Gorman in his essay 'On becoming a jazz musician', that you don't choose this form of music; it chooses you

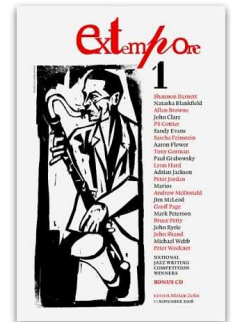
What is also interesting to an outsider is that Evans, together with many other artists in this journal, other musical traditions — India, North Africa Indonesia and Turkey — and seeks to collaborate with musicians from those traditions.

Among the interviews, Andrew Ford's with Tony Gorman is intelligent and poignant — Gorman has contracted MS, but in 2004 managed to release an album entitled *Songs of Hope*.

For a sense of the joy of simply being able to delight in playing the music you love, I recommend the interview with Shannon Barnett.

There is wildness here too — John Clare's 'Rock and Roll diary of a jazz fan' is a hoot. (Is the man still dangerous?)

Peter Newall contributes a fiction piece based upon the song 'I thought about you' (music by Jimmy Van Heusen, lyrics by Johnny Mercer). In it he improvises a tale of love, trains,



ambition, loss and music between the phrases of the song.

Jazz stirs words, and there are 10 fine, considered poems here. Geoff Page takes 'a phrase home to work with' while Allan Browne in 'Little Miles' finds that:

We trailed behind

Pilgrims beguiled

By the fragile harmony

Crying in isolation.

The photographs (Natasha Blankfield and Mark Peterson) and prints (John Ryrie) are about faces and postures: they sweeten the written word.

This is a handsome and stylish magazine of which its editor, Miriam Zolin should be mightily proud. It is a journal for slow reading and I particularly recommend it to those who are not jazz devotees and do not prowl ... yet.

Obama and Baz Luhrmann's Australia

INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Brian McCoy



One of the defining characteristics of an Australian summer is the large number of people who spend their days relaxing on the many beaches that grace our shores. This is our annual holiday time, when families gather to spend days swimming, fishing and surfing. Or, when not so active, people can find plenty of sand dunes and rocky cliffs to sit, rest and walk upon.

At the same time, our coastal hills continue to reveal signs of people who sat on these beachheads long before us. As we barbeque, relax and gaze out to sea we can forget that we often stand upon ancient middens, places where Aboriginal people sat, cooked, ate and shared the stories of their human life, much as we do today.

Our dining rooms and kitchens have replaced older ones. Signs of shell, charcoal and bone abound. They remain just below the surface. Sometimes the wind and erosion of time removes the top-soil and reveals them. Rarely is the history of our land so physically close and tangible. It lies beneath our feet.

Australia Day remembers one particular set of footprints that first appeared in 1788, and the legacy of those early footprints. In the months that followed the arrival of that First Fleet many of those who had only recently arrived, like our summer selves, would often sit upon various coastal hills and cliffs and look out to sea. They waited in expectation for signs of more Tall Ships and news from 'home'.

And, in the decades that followed, others would take up that annual pilgrimage to the coast and look out to sea. Much of our south-east coast is now marked by housing developments that sit on the edge of land and look out beyond it. It is as if we have preferred to look out to sea than journey into the land's heart and mystery.

The film *Australia* captures something of the mixed history of our Australian footprint. We are reminded of the colonial intruder, often an out-of-place and insensitive stranger, the cattle barons and their invasive stock, the Second World War and the bombing of Darwin.

This was a time when men prized their masculinity in wearing side-arms, risking great odds, being independent from authority and consuming large amounts of alcohol.

The film provides telling reminders of very insensitive and violent intrusions upon the land. It also offers a parallel story. Aboriginal children were removed from their families, police implemented government racial policy and settler Australians accepted the many forms of discrimination against the First Peoples of this land.

The film, despite some of its historical errors and exaggerations about remote and Aboriginal Australia, introduces us to a child. This child, born from black and white, becomes a bridge between the two. It is striking that a child, vulnerable and not fully accepted by either group, reveals one to another and what each can become in risking a new relationship.

The film challenges our understanding of history and being colonised and colonisers. It tempts a romanticism of Aboriginal spirituality and ceremony, but this is balanced by more sinister and marginal experiences. We might feel better seeing Aboriginal people remaining mysterious, almost transfigured before us, but we cannot avoid feeling troubled by their humanity being dismissed and where economic, racial and class interests take precedence in most relationships.

We leave the film more sensitised and troubled about how to describe our nation's story. Our history lies so clearly and obviously around us and beneath our feet, yet can also seem so distant. In *Australia* we encounter a child who invites us to a new humanity that binds us to this land and to one another.

Australia Day comes this year shortly after Barak Obama's entry as President into the White House. His election opens a new chapter, particularly for African American people but for all Americans within the United States.

Like the child in the film *Australia*, he also embodies the races of white and black, but now white is no longer dominant. He offers his nation a new maturity and identity and the possibility of healing across racial and other divides.

At his inauguration he invited others to walk with him in a new partnership. He challenged its hearers to take greater responsibility for their relationships. I heard it as an invitation to take off our shoes and walk more sensitively upon the land.

Indonesia's Obama dreaming

POLITICS

Dewi Anggraeni

If you are in one of the big cities in Indonesia, you'll find that most taxi drivers want to talk about the new president in the USA. In fact, they have been since Barack Obama won the election last November.

Indonesia, like many other countries in the Asia Pacific region, has always been interested in US political development. So, on the face of it, the interest in last year's election campaigns was nothing unusual. But it was. Unusually personal, even swelling with emotion. Indonesians collectively felt proud as they watched Barack Obama approaching the White House, step by step, so to speak.



It is true Obama spent four years of his childhood in Jakarta. So what? Many Americans, Australians, Dutch, and other Western children spent as many, if not more, years in Indonesia. Yet generally, Indonesians have not been aware or cared if any of them reached the constellation of power in their respective countries.

Most such children live in Indonesia but are not grounded in the community. They go to international schools, mix with other expatriate children, probably have one or two local friends in their wealthy neighbourhood. Some grow up to be part of Indonesian society. But many more grow out of it soon after they leave Indonesia.

Barack Obama, known then as Barry Soetoro (his mother, Ann Dunham, had married Indonesian Lolo Soetoro after her divorce from Barack Obama Senior), lived with his parents and his younger half-sister, Maya, in the long established Jakarta suburb of Menteng. Their neighbours, though mostly of the comfortable middle-class, were neither rich expatriates nor filthy rich locals. In fact, both Ann and Lolo worked.

Barry went to a local Catholic school for the first two years, then to a local primary school for the remaining two. He did not go to an international school. His friends were mostly Indonesian school mates and neighbourhood children. If he did not make it in time to catch the company minibus which picked up his mother, Saman, a man employed by Ann Dunham to take care of him, would take him to school as a pillion passenger on his bicycle.

Barry lived so close to the ground that Saman, as well as his former neighbours, have vivid memories of him. Saman remembers that when taking him to school on his bicycle, Barry would yell back 'Hoooo, hicks' at children who teased him with 'Negro! Negro!'

Saman was not a valet who did chores for him. Young Barry's mother gave him tasks to complete before and after school and made sure they were done. If not, the boy would be sent to his room without dinner. Before taking a bath, too, Barry had to draw water from the well

himself.

His former schoolmates, who are now living in different cities in Indonesia, all say that Barry had no choice but to eat whatever was put in front of him at meal times. Sometimes the family would have very simple dinners, such as rice, salted fish and chilli. Barry ate them without complaining, even with gusto, his friends recall.

His sister Maya recounted that he sometimes donned a sarong and played with Muslim children at the local mosque, though he himself was not a Muslim.

So after the four years he lived in Indonesia, the country, the people and the culture left their marks on Barack Obama. He too left his marks on the community in which he and his family lived and, by extension, on Jakarta and Indonesia in general.

He learned about being different without being apart. The other children teased him for being darker than most of them, but accepted him. He learned unselfconsciously to live closely with people of another religion. He acquired mental agility and a natural awareness of a culture which would later not be his own, all the while leaving inspiring affection in those he left behind.

The effect of his election win on Indonesia's psyche is also important. September 11 shocked Indonesia, especially when the first Bali bombing followed a year later. But many Indonesians were increasingly dismayed by the United States reaction, which effectively targeted and alienated Muslims.

Hardliners opposed to political reform in Indonesia observed how the US, hitherto regarded as the vanguard of democracy, bypassed democratic principles and built an off-shore prison in Guantanamo Bay where it kept terror suspects for years on end without trial.

They then claimed that they were justified in their stance. Democracy, they said, was an American trickery. It had no place in Indonesia. The way to rid of a government which made life difficult for you was to topple it by force.

Obama's win, something few people would have believed possible even ten years ago, showed them that they were wrong. You can effect change by democratic means. More importantly, this message was not preached at them but demonstrated in actuality.

No cheap shots in clergy abuse drama

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

Doubt: 104 minutes. Rated: M. Director: John Patrick Shanley. Starring: Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams



In the world of cinema, religious figures can make for easy targets. At times, they are caricatured as overly pious, seemingly too attuned to their God to keep touch with the humanity or the changing times around them. Often, they are the rats in the ranks, whose piety is a veil for their own corruptness, self-interest, or dark and damaging secrets.

In an age where distrust of religious institutions runs high, and where that distrust is due in no small part to revelations of child abuse perpetrated by members of the clergy, portrayals of priests can tend to lean towards the weak or villainous.

Doubt deals with the subject of clergy child abuse, though not in the way you might expect. Set in a Catholic school in the Bronx in 1964, it's not concerned with caricature and cliché, far less with polemic (if that's what you're after, try the 2007 documentary [Deliver Us From Evil](#)), but rather is a finely wrought, character-driven drama where ambiguities abound and truth remains elusive.

Hoffman is Father Brendan Flynn, a charismatic, approachable priest, who is in charge of the local parish. He's the foil to Streep's hard-nosed headmistress, Sister Aloysius, who is cynical about Father Flynn's progressive ways.

Father Flynn has taken a particular interest in Donald Miller (Joseph Foster), a young African-American student and altar boy, who is somewhat ostracised in the all-white student body. They are close — perhaps too close, in the bright but naïve eyes of young nun and schoolteacher, Sister James (Adams), who immediately brings her concerns to Sister Aloysius.

On the slimmest of pretexts, fuelled by her own dubious and malicious instincts — and, to be fair, concern for the alleged victim — Sister Aloysius launches a vendetta against Father Flynn, convinced of his guilt, and determined to have him removed at all costs.

Shanley's adaptation of his own Pulitzer Prize-winning play is an intriguing study of guilt and deceit. It is bracketed by monologues about doubt. The former takes the shape of a homily; the latter, an admission of guilt, though by whom I won't say.

But the most insidious 'doubt' that pervades the film relates to the kinds of images and feelings that can spring to mind when considering the portrayal of religious authorities in film or media. The unsettling events of the plot play in to the doubts of the film's characters. These

same events interrogate the audience's doubts.

So is Flynn guilty or not? Needless to say, the film leaves room for, well, doubt. But one of its most potent conclusions is that when it comes to fanning fears regarding the wellbeing of children, doubt can do as much damage as fact. A sermon presented by Father Flynn on the irretrievability of gossip drives this point home in vivid fashion.

Grandeur and banality as Obama ascends

POLITICS

Binoy Kampmark

The crowds gathered in chilly Washington D.C. were huge, a buzzing 'mass of humanity' as a reporter for American network MSNBC put it, with 'children living their history'.



It was grand ceremony, punctuated by occasional moments of banality — Elizabeth Alexander's poem was a touch prosaic, but then again, it was meant to be, extolling the genius of measured pragmatism, the gutsy pursuit of settling a rugged West, the taming of environment for prosperity — and nervousness, as witnessed in Chief Justice John Roberts' stumbling over quoting the oath.

There was, of course, only one reason most had journeyed to Washington. Barack Obama's inauguration speech straddled old themes. Americans needed to return to certain core truths: 'challenges may be new', but their values were eternal, 'honesty, and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance, loyalty and patriotism.'

These were times, he said, where his oath was 'taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms'. The greedy had tinkered with market forces. A global 'network of violence' continued to threaten American interests. As President John F. Kennedy had exhorted before him, burdens of responsibility long-shed had to be retaken.

'We have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly.' There had been a distinct and 'collective failure to make hard choices'.

Americans needed to be 'faithful to the ideals of our forebears, and true to our founding documents'. Terrorism would not trump the ideals of civilisation (an always difficult concept — terrorism, and violence, are so often the essence of civilisational preservation and spread). Safety would not compromise ideals (a statement drawn from his campaign drawer).

And there was that renewed interest in government — the question, Obama posed, was not the issue of how large or small government is, but whether it works. Programs that don't will be scrapped, he said, with an air of almost Ronald Reagan-like foreboding.

One thing distinctly not in the shadow of Reagan was the admission by Obama that markets, despite being engines for prosperity, needed a watchful eye. The creation of wealth can never be the pursuit of the few. Excesses needed to be policed and curtailed.

In the end, Obama said what was expected. He acknowledged the animating principles of the republic. Even George Washington deserved a mention: when the incipient republic, with

its freezing patriots, risked annihilation at the hands of the British, an epiphany presented itself: 'Let it be hold to the future world ... that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive ... that the city and the country, alarmed by one common danger, came forth to meet [it].'

Obama sought, as David Brooks of the *New York Times* hoped he would, to pitch a message ending the Great Disruption, a term coined by Francis Fukuyama to describe periods of political strife and division that followed from the 1960s. Americans, Obama insisted, were strengthened by their very 'patchwork' existence, invigorated rather than weakened by disparateness.

'We are ready to lead once more.' How that leadership takes shape will be a point of curiosity and perhaps a little dread. The world cannot do without American influence and an understanding of both its power and limits. Whether it can do without the 'stale political arguments' of old remains to be seen.

Smells like Adelaide

NON-FICTION

Malcolm King



After living for 20 years in Melbourne, ageing parents and a desire for fresh fruit drew me back to Adelaide.

I have good memories of growing up in the City of Churches in the 1960s. As a kid, I roamed with impunity around the streets of suburban Goodwood with its creeks and large Greek and Italian communities.

Adelaide has a large, country-town feel about it. Sputes (sports utes) abound and the word 'bogan' is a term of endearment.

The mullet hair cut, check shirt and ugg boots, so fashionable in the days of Sherbert and Skyhooks, have never really gone out of fashion here.

These are my people.

The 'six degrees of separation' theory is alive and well as strangers play 'who knows who' under a pale blue sky drinking dark Coopers Ale in a beer garden full of frangipani.

The Central Market is a sensual delight. When I was five I'd stand at the Charlesworth Nut Stand every week and a jolly woman would pinch my cheeks and give me a small bag of sugar-coated peanuts. Charlesworths are still there.

Nowhere on earth can one find nectarines and peaches in such chin-dripping quality and abundance as in Adelaide. The black alluvial soils of the Murray Valley are perfect for growing stone fruit.

I can trace Adelaide by its scents: the pink fairly floss of the Royal Show, Perrimans Pastry Shop in North Adelaide, the acrid electricity smell of the Glenelg tram and the crisp, clear air of Waterfall Gully, to name just a few.

Back then class ran through the city like a fault line down King William Street, with the blue blood Protestants to the east and the Catholic working class to the west.

Although I ended up going to an establishment school, I never really fitted in. One of the benefits of being born Catholic, poor and from a single mother was never having to worry about being invited to the Fotheringham-Smythes' pool parties. Such is life.

I mixed with a rat pack of young friends who cared more about surfing and music, than who was doing what to whom.

We used to write letters to the editor of the daily paper calling on pedestrians to walk on

one side of the footpath in the morning and on the other after midday. We were idiots.

Yet shadows have fallen over the City of Churches. Some months ago the Victorian Premier John Brumby called Adelaide a 'backwater'. He's half right.

In some quarters state pride has turned to parochial anger, which threatens to strangle innovation and entrepreneurialism at a time when South Australia is getting back on its feet.

The cult of the 'nay-sayers' is alive and well.

Young people are leaving and manufacturing industries are in decline. It's not the fear of murder that stalks the City of Churches, as some reports would have you believe. It's fear of change.

A few years ago Charles Landry, an Adelaide Thinker in Residence and 'future cities' expert said, 'We need to change perceptions of Adelaide from a place to leave to a destination to come to'.

The state government is pushing social and technological change. Its plan is to make the city a modern university hub and to bring technology leaders and students from all over the world. A mini Oxford-on-the-Torrens.

There's a deep goodness and generosity about the people who live here. Adelaidians, like their football teams, are proud of the past and confident of the future.

As we enjoy another summer, the vines in the backyard are heavy with grapes and nectarines. Silver foil strips hang in the trees to keep the birds away from the peaches.

It's hard to be cynical when you're drinking some of the best wine in the world and feasting on fantastic cheeses and fruits.

Obama's victory for African Australians

POLITICS

Saeed Saeed

Barack Obama's historic triumph was not only a watershed moment for African Americans.

Australian African communities celebrated long into the night in Sydney's Blacktown, and an 'Obama Street Party' was held in Victoria's Noble Park by South Sudanese youth. Melbourne's South Sudanese shopkeepers even got involved and gave away free soft drinks to customers.



Why the fuss?

While political pundits harp on about America's political realignment, Africans are celebrating the global mental shift President Obama represents. Obama has re-balanced the scale of black role models in the public sphere, which have been confined to actors, pop stars and sports people.

The mild mannered 47-year-old is not a Will Smith, a Stevie Wonder or a Usain Bolt. His success was not triggered by a natural or prodigious talent. Instead, it was Obama's powerful intellect and commitment to hard work that captured the world's imagination and respect.

Of course, Smith, Wonder and Bolt possess these qualities too. But in terms of media representation, Obama's electoral victory is the equivalent of watching the moon landing. It compensated those who were not yet born to witness Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech, or Nelson Mandela when he became South Africa's first black president.

The galvanising effect this had on Australia's African communities has been immediate. The media coverage, with its constant reference to Obama's Kenyan heritage, made this heritage the dominant talking point among African Australian youth.

'Every day we would talk about Obama', said 21-year-old former Eritrean refugee, Magdi Yasseen, a biomedical student who lives in the North Melbourne housing commission flats. 'Before, you found people my age only talking about which group fought who, and which guys got in trouble with the police.'

A Somali youth told me that Obama's victory broke down an 'invisible wall' within him and he found a new confidence he has carried ever since.

Such examples may seem insignificant, but they go a long way to short-circuit the negativity in African Australian communities, bred by historical grudges and ineffective social services. Obama's victory has helped defeat a ghetto philosophy that emphasises survival over achievement, and the deep rooted belief you are inherently less likely to achieve because you

appear different.

This belief system is primarily passed down by parents who formerly lived under a racist, colonial rule. Upon hearing my ambition to become a journalist, elders in my community quietly suggested I adopt a western pen-name to increase my chances of employment.

Such thinking is also supported by handsomely funded job network agencies that channel refugees into low-skill, dead-end jobs despite their qualifications. Hence you have factory workers who were formerly doctors, economists and diplomats. Their children view their plight as damning evidence that education is an ineffective pathway to financial and social success.

Such beliefs are reinforced by a complacent media where black intellect is predominantly overshadowed by images of mad dictators, violent youth, misogynistic pop stars and of physical prowess on the sporting field.

Obama's success in politics — a field that minority groups have long viewed as the final frontier — helped to alleviate the fatalism of these communities towards political participation.

In the UK, African and Asian youth, already dubbed by the press as the 'Obama Generation', began enrolling in community programs looking at political and social empowerment.

If Australian social services are indeed serious about social inclusion, they need to recognise this development and create programs harnessing this new wave of optimism among minority groups. As racial barriers fall, their aspirations will increase. Programs that link them to society's leaders are crucial in nurturing that growth.

Operation Black Vote, in the United Kingdom, is one such program. Established in 1996, it has senior Welsh politicians mentoring young political hopefuls from minority backgrounds. Similar Australian programs would allow our multiculturalism to escape culinary and sporting confines to reach our most important social arenas.

Spurred by the enthusiasm of Obama's victory, such programs will cultivate within minority groups a new frame of reference in which to view themselves. Ultimately, it will allow them to achieve their goals with their dignity, and their real name, intact.

Saturday night jukebox

POETRY

Thom Sullivan

Jukebox

big o on saturday
night jukebox the
wireless warbling
burling a sweet
desertion above
the hiss of greasy
fry a floury knead
of pizza wheeling
awkward waxing
outside a rank of
gloomy farm utes
wide-eyed gazing
down a rainy main
street only a lonely
hound dog howling
crooning a primal
lovelust upwards
towards a doughy
round of moon.

Oneiric

Of course, you know little of the fact that —
by night — I don a mask and moonlight,
alternately, as a prince and beggar. And

on other nights, as a Bengal tiger with flames
in place of claws. You do not see me firstly
as pure animal, then as pure machine.

The words alone — and the words must be alone —
are themselves the pearl of great price. And
I have made ready to sell all my belongings,
to set out into the field to dig the night.

Of course, you know little of the thousand dark,
wind-riven nights on which I was alone —
bruised, blundering through the field.

Blundering, and yet gentle with the grasses,
folding each leaf down with measured caution.

Of course, you cannot know this —
you may only follow with telltale footsteps
through the darkness, unearthing reams
where you pass, where you fold them
down again. This is the dream. And the dream
from which you will waken. I will become
pure machine: lit from within by oil — golden oil,
oil of night. I will powder the field for treasure,
forgetting — perhaps — that the field itself
is priceless — the mother of all pearls.

I will blunder and yet be gentle, and yet
raise it up into darkness on flaming claws.

Tim Fischer's Bhutanese blind spot

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Former Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer is a great Australian who injects positive energy into almost everything he touches. This month he takes up his appointment as Australia's Ambassador to the Holy See. As a result, he's had to step down from many of his positions, including co-chair of the [Australia Bhutan Friendship Association](#) .

Through his personal relationship with King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, he has nurtured the feudal Himalayan kingdom in its necessary adjustment to the demands of the modern world. In other circumstances, such a tiny undeveloped country might have become a failed state, or been swamped by a powerful neighbour and gone the way of Tibet.

Wangchuk ended the absolute monarchy in 1998, in favour of what Fischer [calls](#) 'an enlightened, democratic constitutional monarchy'. He has avoided the violence that finished the monarchy in neighbouring Nepal, and threatens to do so in other small nations such as Tonga. Last year he abdicated in favour of his son, as part of a timely transfer of power to the next generation.

Championing the cause of Bhutan's political sustainability, Fischer has also worked to help it to maintain its cultural integrity. His efforts have been bolstered by the interest of westerners fascinated by aspects of Bhutanese culture. An example is the 2003 Australian co-produced feature film [Travellers and Musicians](#). Foreigners are particularly taken by Wangchuk's concept of 'gross national happiness', which identifies a wellbeing that transcends materialism.

However there is a dark and little known aspect to Bhutan's attempts to preserve its culture, which could be more precisely termed 'purification'. In fact Human Rights Watch last year [called it](#) 'Bhutan's ethnic cleansing'.

From the late 80's Bhutanese authorities began intimidating and physically abusing ethnic Nepalis who lived in Bhutan. The king introduced laws that stripped the ethnic Nepalis of their citizenship and provided for confiscation of their land and expulsion. Today about 108,000 of these stateless Bhutanese live in seven refugee camps inside Nepal. Many have been there for nearly two decades.

'The army took all the people from their houses,' a young refugee [told](#) Human Rights Watch. 'As we left Bhutan, we were forced to sign the document. They snapped our photos. The man told me to smile, to show my teeth. He wanted to show that I was leaving my

country willingly, happily, that I was not forced to leave.'

Unfortunately Tim Fischer's close links with Wangchuk appear to have blinded him to such collateral damage of Bhutan's prosecution of its gross national happiness. He is co-author of a 368-page [book](#) on Bhutan's history and prospects which is about to be published by CopyRight Publishing in Brisbane. The table of contents and index are on the website. The publisher confirmed to *Eureka Street* that the text does not mention the ethnic Nepali Bhutanese expelled from the country.

The full title of the book is *From Jesuits to Jetsetters, Bold Bhutan Beckons - inhaling Gross National Happiness*. Fischer is gracious in his portrayal of the Jesuits' role in building the country, particularly in education. He [says](#) they 'did not try to convert Buddhists to Christians, but rather to motivate students to having an enquiring mind'.

Perhaps the enquiring mind developed by Fischer's own Jesuit education will lead him to visit the Jesuit Refugee Service during his time in Rome. While the Jesuits have continued their role in education in Bhutan in recent years, they have also [worked](#) with ethnic Nepali Bhutanese in the refugee camps on the Nepali side of the border, for much of the past two decades. Fischer's enquiries at the Jesuit Refugee Service could prove very fruitful.

How the world is failing the Palestinians

POLITICS

Shahram Akbarzadeh

With nearly 1200 Palestinians dead in the Gaza Strip after three weeks of fighting, Israel has offered a ceasefire. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has declared that Israel has achieved its objectives. This is highly doubtful.



What will be the achievements of Israel's 'shock and awe' campaign in Gaza? The objective has been to destroy the infrastructure of Hamas in order to prevent the firing of further missiles at Israeli cities.

This was a very tall order. Not only because it expected the Israeli Defence Force to accurately target Hamas fighters in the densely populated Gaza Strip when they could simply blend in with the general population, but also because it did nothing to prevent the resurgence of Hamas, which is inevitable once the IDF leaves Gaza.

The overwhelming show of force was supposed to act as deterrence against future Hamas missiles. This is a tried and failed tactic. The 2006 operation against Hizbullah was conducted along the same lines.

Instead Hizbullah surprised Israel with its resilience and grew in esteem in the Arab world. The 2006 campaign in Lebanon proved to be a major embarrassment for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert who was criticised by his peers for not defeating Hizbullah once and for all. Now the Israeli leadership claims to have learned from that experience. That is why the military operation in Gaza has been so intense. The IDF threw all its weight on Hamas.

But that was a wrong lesson. It must be obvious to any observer that even in the unlikely event of the IDF destroying the fighting capability of Hamas, the grievances that propelled Hamas onto the political stage in 2006 when it won the parliamentary elections, will continue to sustain it.

This is bad for Israel and bad for the Palestinians. Mahmoud Abbas, who is still recognised by the international community as the president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), has been losing popularity and support because of his failure to achieve Palestinian statehood.

A veteran of the Oslo peace process which established the PA in 1995 as a first step towards statehood, Abbas must seem like a spent force. His diminishing popularity and that of his associates among the Palestinians leaves the political stage open to less accommodating leaders. The intensity of Israel's operation in Gaza has sidelined moderate Palestinian leaders who have lost credibility to the more radical factions.

For the Palestinians, it must seem like the whole world has turned a blind eye to their

plight. The ineffectiveness of the international community to stop the disproportionate use of force by the IDF sends a worrying signal to the Palestinians.

Israel chooses to ignore the UN Security Council resolution for the immediate cessation of hostilities (passed 9 January 2009) and the international community appears powerless to do anything about it. The IDF shells a UN run school, killing Palestinian refugees, and the UN Relief and Works Agency in Gaza and get away with it.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is a very unfortunate diplomatic failure. As far as the Palestinians are concerned it leaves little room for hope. Hopelessness and the feeling of being forgotten by the world are very dangerous. It is exactly the kind of sentiment that puts Israel at more risk.

The ineffectiveness of international diplomacy in halting the Israeli operation is even more striking in relation to Arab states. For more than five decades the Arabs have lamented the Palestinian plight. They even went to war with Israel. But since their defeat in 1973 and the failure of the oil embargo to influence US/international policy in favour of the Palestinians, they have no stomach for more confrontation.

Besides, they now have a real worry about al-Qaeda type groups within their own domains and are quietly delighted to see Hamas receive a pounding. Unfortunately for the Palestinians, all this means that they cannot hope to receive any support beyond rhetoric from Arab states.

This leaves the door wide open for Iran and its highly exaggerated position on Israel. As far as the Palestinians are concerned, President Ahmadinejad is the only world leader who has been unequivocal about the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. His calls for the destruction of Israel and reported arm shipments to Gaza, places Shia Iran right in the middle of the on-going Israeli/Palestinian dispute.

With its growing esteem as a champion of the Palestinian cause, however misguided, the Shia Iran has managed to bridge the gap with the Sunni Arabs.

Israel's choice for a disproportionate use of force in Gaza and the inevitable loss of civilian lives will have long term repercussions. This experience will make it even more difficult to garner popular support for diplomatic negotiations regarding the future of Palestine.