



Welcome to Ngambri and Ngunnawal Country. Thank you for coming to the Honest History symposium ‘Presenting, choosing, measuring, changing history’.

From there to here

The Honest History venture began in 2013, provoked by the then imminent Anzac centenary, and here we are in 2018, 3000 website posts, 20 000 Tweets, and 54 newsletters later. And a book, *The Honest History Book*, which has sold more than 2000 copies. We have gathered more than 2000 Twitter followers in Australia and overseas and almost 1200 Facebook likes. Our newsletters go to almost 1000 addresses. Our book reviews have grown in readership and some of our featured themes (for example, Australia’s prodigious spending on the Anzac centenary, Anzackery, and the Australian War Memorial’s links with arms manufacturers) have been picked up by the mainstream media. We have made many presentations to school and community groups.

What we have been saying

Honest History’s main argument has been consistent, though the words have varied slightly. Early on, it was ‘not only but also’ – not only Anzac as an Australian story but many other stories as well – but, by the time *The Honest History Book* was published in April 2017, the mantra had become ‘Australia is more than Anzac – and always has been’, and they were the words that appeared on the front cover of the book.

Of course, we said, war has been important in Australian history, not so much because of what Australians have done in war, but because of what war has done to Australians, to Australia, and to other countries and people. We tried to distinguish between Anzackery, the sentimental, jingoistic version of the legend, and a quieter, more useful Anzac, which might help us towards a peaceful future. Even Anzac, we argued, was not the established church; Australians had the right to be atheist or agnostic about it, to not worship at Anzac altars.

Honest History has often critiqued the official ‘commemoration industry’. Someone has to: as historian Peter Cochrane said in 2015, draping ‘Anzac’ over an argument makes it sacrosanct. Put another way, khaki-tinged rhetoric flows relentlessly to fill the space available – unless people push back. Some people have been wary of pushing against this tide for fear of being seen as unpatriotic.

As Alison Broinowski and I said in the concluding chapter of *The Honest History Book*, the best way of restoring balance to the way Australians see our history is to emphasise its ‘non-khaki’ parts, the parts that are ‘more than Anzac’.

[That] means trying to understand the history of our environment, of the multicultural country that immigrants from 200 countries have built, of the devastating effects of economic upheaval but the smugness that prosperity can breed. It means confronting the evidence of the growing gap between unequal 21st-century reality and our

comforting national myth of egalitarianism. It means asking why leadership by women has not been recognised and promoted, so that our first is not our only female prime minister, and young women can aspire to and become leaders in all fields. It also means confronting – and ending – our continuing adolescent relationships with the monarchy, regardless of the “star power” of its current representatives, and with great and powerful friends who take us for granted.

Most of all, upsizing our non-khaki side means facing up to what [Eualeyai-Kamillaroi historian] Larissa Behrendt calls “the invasion moment”, for “until we do that we will never have found a way to truly share this colonised country”. That invasion of 1788 and its consequences deserve far more of our attention today than do the failed invasion of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and our military ventures since.

Today’s program

As we said on the first page of *The Honest History Book*, quoting EH Carr, ‘History means interpretation’. The discipline of history is a contest between interpretations – and interpretation involves using and choosing evidence. Honest history, we said, is interpretation robustly supported by evidence. We have spent five years presenting evidence that there is more to Australian history than military adventures.

To develop a balanced outlook on our history we need to grasp how history is presented and used, how it concerns our present and future as well as our past, how it changes and how it changes us. That is what today is about. There are no formal papers and no Powerpoint presentations; we hope that the discussion can be carried forward by the questions posed by the discussion leaders, the insights of the panellists and the comments from the audience.

Thanks

Honest History has accumulated many debts. As editor of the website, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of our contributors, the Honest History committee, our webmaster, our distinguished supporters, our book reviewers, our volunteer researchers, our Twitter and Facebook followers, our allies in like-minded organs and associations, and numerous schoolteachers and academics.

The future of Honest History

When we began the Honest History venture we envisaged that it would last for five years, roughly the time span of the Anzac centenary. Now that the five years is well and truly up, we are looking at ways of keeping the website active in a way that minimises demands on our (small and exhausted) group of volunteers but that continues to provide a useful resource for students, teachers and the general public.

Exactly what this future comprises – and how long it lasts – is still being worked out. In 2019, you will still find us at honesthistory.net.au, admin@honesthistory.net.au, on Twitter and Facebook, and through our occasional newsletters. Please keep in touch.

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Honest History
8 November 2018