



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/JVON5553>

**Melissa Harper and Richard White (Editors), *Symbols of Australia: Imagining a Nation***

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**To cite this book review:** Melissa Harper and Richard White (Editors), *Symbols of Australia: Imagining a Nation* by Jatinder Mann, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 3 (September 2023): 205-206, <https://doi.org/10.52230/JIUS1837>

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Melissa Harper and Richard White (Editors), *Symbols of Australia: Imagining a Nation* (Sydney: NewSouth Books, 2021), 464pp. Paperback. A\$39.99. ISBN: 978-1-7422-3712-1.

Melissa Harper and Richard White's fascinating edited collection (a second edition) looks at the symbols of Australia and the way in which they relate to Australia's ideas of itself as a nation. As they point out the country has no shortage of symbols and perhaps because of this their collection has got to be one of the longest that I have ever reviewed: 28 substantive chapters in total! Although this is a very comprehensive coverage of the subject, it made reviewing the book quite difficult. In this review I will focus on several chapters which illustrate a good cross range of symbols, i.e. animals, objects, people, and places. Specifically, the kangaroo, flag, lifesaver, and Uluru.

Beth Hatton and Linda Thompson's chapter on the 'Kangaroo' charts the historical journey that this internationally so well-known symbol of Australia has had in the country, from initially being met with curiosity by British settlers although still hunted for its meat, to being regarded as a pest and mass culled, before being firmly established as a symbol of the nascent nation after Federation along with the emu through its new coat of arms. Hatton and Thompson highlight the importance of the TV show *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo* for internationalising the kangaroo as a symbol of Australia. However, they also draw attention to the rather irreverent way in which popular media in Australia has treated kangaroos, perhaps indicating a broader view of Australians not taking themselves too seriously. The kangaroo has also become synonymous with Qantas (Sprit of Australia), Australia's national airline as well as the Australian Tourism Commission.

'Flag' by Elizabeth Kwan explores the rather complex history of 'flags' as symbols of Australia. Kwan quite rightly points out that Australia has had several flags which have acted as symbols of the country, most notably the Union Jack, the Blue Ensign (which was the basis of Australia's current flag), and the Aboriginal Flag (very controversially). The chapter begins with a discussion of a 'memorial' held by a number of far-right groups to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cronulla Riots in 2015, which featured the Australian flag very prominently. So, Kwan quite adeptly illustrates here that symbols of a country are not always used for positive purposes. The chapter emphasises the importance of the changes introduced, perhaps surprisingly, by the Menzies government in the 1950s to give priority to Australia's current flag. Menzies did not make much fanfare of the changes, actually understating them, as he knew how vexed an issue the country's flag was. Kwan also discusses the controversy surrounding the use of the Aboriginal Flag as a symbol of Australia. Aboriginal groups understandably are extremely weary of Australia adopting this flag as a symbol of the country, as this would represent in their eyes yet another act of cultural appropriation by the settler colonial state.

Caroline Ford's chapter on 'Lifesaver' argues that the rise of the lifesaver as a symbol of Australia mirrored the growth of Australians visiting the beach for recreational purposes at the turn of the twentieth century. The image of the tall, muscled, and bronzed lifesaver that subsequently emerged became firmly imprinted in the national psyche as epitomising the very best of Australia. However, this emphasis on hyper-masculinity was exclusionary of women (who were not allowed to become Lifesavers until 1980!) which made the long-term survival of Lifesavers as a prominent national symbol problematic. The nation also began to cool on Lifesavers as representing the best of the nation, with an increasing number of Australians

viewing them as arrogant and throwing their weight around on the nation's beaches. But Ford does point out that at the 2000 Sydney Olympics Lifesavers featured prominently in the symbols of the nation that were on international display. The Lifesavers on display though were those from the 1930s not current ones, so harking back to an era that was very much their prime when it comes to being a prominent symbol of the nation.

'Uluru' by Roslynn Haynes explores the very fraught history of one of Australia's most well-known geographical marvels. But as Haynes rightly points out Uluru has always meant much more to its traditional Aboriginal owners: the Anangu people. It being a sacred place and one that has huge importance in the history of their people and even their origins. This was sadly completely ignored for centuries by British settlers. The most striking example of this was tourists being allowed to climb on top of Uluru against the express wishes of the local Anangu people. Therefore, the symbolic returning of ownership of Uluru to its traditional Aboriginal owners in the 1970s by the Whitlam government was hugely significant. Haynes also emphasises the importance of the return of Uluru for the broader Aboriginal land rights movement, as Australian governments had refused to do this for so long as they were concerned that the Anangu people would end tourism to the area. This turned out to be an unjustified concern as the traditional Aboriginal owners have actually continued tourism, but operate it in a way that is respectful of their culture and beliefs. The chapter ends with reflecting on the importance of Uluru as a symbol of Australia, especially for Aboriginal peoples as the recent campaign for an Aboriginal voice in parliament was called the 'Uluru Statement'.

I wholeheartedly recommend this very interesting and broad ranging collection to readers. It will appeal to general and specialised ones, although perhaps more to the latter. As mentioned at the outset the book contains many more chapters that will be of interest to readers.

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