Introduction to Australian Society: Reconciling Australia

Class code
SOC-UA 9970 004

Instructor Details
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Consultations by appointment.

Class Details
Introduction to Australian Society: Reconciling Australia

Thursdays 11:00-12:30
Room 304
NYU Sydney Academic Centre

Prerequisites
None

Class Description
Australia is a place of tensions: the ‘lucky country’ founded on the theft of Indigenous people’s land; the ‘land of the fair go’ with mandatory detention of refugees; a place with a noticeably sentimental culture coupled with a satirical sense of humour; a multicultural nation with a history of a ‘white Australia policy’; a place proud of its traditions of egalitarianism and mateship with rules about who is allowed in ‘the club’; a place with a strong sense of a distinctive local traditions which takes many of its cues from global culture; a place with a history of anti-British and anti-American sentiment that also has had strong political allegiances and military pacts with Britain and the USA; a place of a laid-back, easygoing attitude with a large degree of Governmental control of individual liberties; a highly urbanised population that romances ‘the bush’ and ‘the outback’ as embodying ‘real’ Australia; and a place with a history of progressive social policy and a democratic tradition, which has never undergone a revolution. Through readings, discussion and research we will attempt to reconcile these contradictions.

This course will focus on the way in which culture – i.e. music, journalism, history, literature, comedy, cinema, food and sport – has reflected and created these tensions. Where possible, it will look at how major issues in Australian culture and society have played out or been embodied in its largest and oldest city: Sydney.

The course will be broken up into three units:
- Unit A ‘Contested Histories’ weeks 2-6;
- Unit B ‘Politics and Place’ weeks 7-10; and
- Unit C ‘Culture and Consumption’ weeks 11-14.

Classes will take the form of a one-and-a-half hour seminar. This seminar will be an informal discussion so please come prepared to discuss the week’s topic and the readings. Each week students will be required to examine a primary document to give them some insight into how
attitudes on certain issues have played out in Australia. The secondary sources are there to help us critically frame these issues and attitudes and give them historical perspective.

There will be at approximately three field trips (details TBA) including a visit to Armidale from 15th to 22nd September.

Desired Outcomes

Students will be expected to develop:

- a critical understanding of Australian culture and its history;
- an awareness of the politics of gender, race and class in Australian society;
- an understanding of the ways in which issues in Australian society are both local and transnational
- independent research skills through the major research essay.

Assessment Components

30% Class Participation

30% Reflection on your internship in Armidale: discuss the degree to which Armidale can be thought of as a rural city that is Reconciling Australia. 600 words due in class in Week 6.

40% Major research essay (2000 words due in class in Week 14). For this assessment, students will be expected to locate a site in Sydney and examine how it has embodied, or been witness to, a broader issue in Australian culture. (For instance: Oxford St and gay rights; China Town and multiculturalism; the Sydney Harbour Bridge and reconciliation). The research for this essay can either be sociological (interviews with residents, stake-holders) or historical (archive-based research). Both the site and the research question are to be developed in consultation with Toby during Week 5.

Failure to submit or fulfil any required course component results in failure of the class.

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning. Creative work is of a highly sophisticated standard.

Grade B: Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research. Creative work is of a superior standard.

Grade C: Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level. Creative work is of an acceptable standard.

Grade D: Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations. Creative work is of a basic standard.

Grade F: Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.
NYU Sydney uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

- A=94-100
- A-=90-93
- B+=87-89
- B=84-86
- B-=80-83
- C+=77-79
- C=74-76
- C-=70-73
- D+=67-69
- D=65-66
- F=below 65

Where no specific numerical equivalent is assigned to a letter grade by the class teacher, the midpoint of the range will be used in calculating the final class grade (except in the A range, where 95.5 will be used).

NYU Sydney aims to have grading standards and results similar to those that prevail at Washington Square. At the College of Arts and Sciences, roughly 39% of all final grades are in the B+ to B- range, and 50% in the A/A- range.

We have therefore adopted the following grading guideline: in any non-Stern course, class teachers should try to insure that no more than 50% of the class receives an A or A-. (Stern has a different grading policy that we follow in all Stern courses).

A guideline is not a curve. A guideline is just that: it gives an ideal benchmark for the distribution of grades towards which we work.

NYU Sydney has a strict policy about course attendance for students. Faculty will not give students permission to be absent for any reason. Students should contact their instructors to catch up on missed work but should *not* approach them for excused absences.

All non-medical absence requests must be presented by the student to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs. Non-medical requests should be made in advance of the intended absence. All medical-based absence requests MUST be presented to the Student Life Coordinator. In the case of illness, the student should contact the Student Life Coordinator within three days of the absence or as soon as practicable and provide medical documentation. Faculty will be informed of excused absences by the Student Life staff and Assistant Director, Academic Programs. Any absences of which faculty have not been informed by the NYU Sydney staff will be presumed to be unexcused.

Students are expected to arrive to class promptly both at the start of class and after breaks. Arriving more than 10 minutes late or leaving more than 10 minutes early will be considered an unexcused absence.

This attendance policy also applies for classes involving a field trip or other off-campus visit. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the agreed meeting point on time.
The faculty will report all unexcused absences to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs, and students’ final grades will be negatively impacted by each such absence. Each unexcused absence will result in the deduction of 3 percentage points from the final grade. More than two unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.

There will be no adjustment of attendance records after the end of the semester. If you wish to contest an unexcused absence, you must do so before you leave Sydney. Contact the Assistant Director, Academic Programs to discuss the attendance record as soon as you think there may be a discrepancy about your attendance in class on a given day.

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.

Students must notify their professor and the Assistant Director, Academic Programs in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

Written work due in class must be submitted during class time to your instructor.

Late work should be submitted in person to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs during regular office hours (9:30-5:00, Monday-Friday). You must also submit an electronic copy of late written work to the Assistant Director, Academic Programs – megan.carrigy@nyu.edu - for submission to Turn-it-in.

The Assistant Director, Academic Programs will mark down the date and time of submission in the presence of the student. In the absence of the Assistant Director, Academic Programs, another member of the administrative staff can accept the work in person, following the same protocol.

Work submitted after the submission time without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale for each day the work is late.

Written work submitted beyond five (5) weekdays after the submission date without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

Any course work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form. All students must submit an electronic copy of each piece of written work to www.turnitin.com. Instructions will be provided to you in class.

Penalties for confirmed cases of plagiarism are severe and are dealt with by the Director, NYU Sydney, not your instructor. Your home school will be notified and you will be dealt with according to the standards of that school. The codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges are outlined in the respective school’s academic resources.

You are not required to buy any texts. The weekly required readings should be available on the NYU database, in the Science House reading room, on other on-line databases (i.e jstor.org, search.informit.com.au or trove.nla.gov.au) or in the collection of State Library on Macquarie St 15 mins walk from campus. The required weekly readings, along with the extra readings, should form
the basis of your independent research essay. You should be able to research further from the bibliographies in these readings and with consultation.

**Books:**
Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005
Bain Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia*, Sydney, 1996
Fran De Groen and Peter Kirkpatrick (eds), *Serious Frolic: Essays on Australian Humour*, UQP, Brisbane, 2009
Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds (eds), *What’s Wrong With Anzac: The militarisation of Australian history*, New South Press, Sydney, 2010
Mark McKenna, *Looking For Blackfellas Point*, UNSW Press, 2003

**Journals:**
*Aboriginal History*
*Australian Cultural History*
*Australian Economic History*
*Australian Historical Studies*
*Australian Journal of Politics and History*
*Australian Literary Studies*
*Gender and History*
*Griffith Review*
History Australia
Journal of Australian Studies
Journal of Women’s History
Labour History
Meanjin
Overland
Public History Review
Quadrant
Southerly

Movies:
Gallipoli
Muriel’s Wedding
Bran Nue Day
Puberty Blues
Beneath Clouds
Head On
Finished People
Samson and Delilah
Adventures of Barry McKenzie
Sunday too far away
The Proposition
Wolf Creek
Wake In Fright
Picnic At Hanging Rock

Television:
Kath and Kim
Summer Heights High
An audience with Dame Edna Everage

Music:
The Triffids, Born Sandy Devotional
Go-Betweens, Before Hollywood
Various artists, Buried Country
Sara Storer, Beautiful Circle
Anne Kirpatrick, Showman’s Daughter
Slim Dusty, Best of Slim Dusty
Paul Kelly, Post
You Am I, Hourly Daily

Web Sites:
Dictionary of Sydney:
http://home.dictionaryofsydney.org/
Trove (digitised newspapers and more):
State Library of NSW:
http://s1.nsw.gov.au

Internet Research Guidelines
N/A
The Harbour: Icons and Cliches

The course will begin where we are, geographically: the Rocks by Sydney Harbour. Sydney Harbour is one of the most recognisable symbols of Australia. It is also popularly seen as ‘the birthplace of the nation’. The readings this week will help us understand these clichés and the stories behind them.

Required Readings:

Additional Readings:
- Grace Karskens, The Colony, Allen and Unwin, Sydney 2010
- Inga Clendinnen, Dancing With Strangers, Cambridge University Press, c2005

Questions for consideration:
How have Australians and international visitors understood the Harbour? Why is it iconographic? What are national icons? What do they mean? How does Hughes place Indigenous people in the story of the ‘birth’ of the nation?

This week we also discuss the assessment criteria for the course and make consultation times to discuss the research essay.

Black Armband versus White Blindfold History: Making the Indigenous story the national story

The 1980s, 90s and 2000s have seen polarising debates about whether Australian history is the story of glorious progress to nationhood or the story of violent dispossession. The place of Indigenous people and their histories is central to these debates. Recent Prime Ministers such as Paul Keating, John Howard and Kevin Rudd have weighed in, seeing history as a political strategy. This week we will look at the role Indigenous histories play in contemporary Australian politics and society.

Required Readings:
1. Primary Source: Paul Keating’s Redfern Speech, 1993

Additional Readings:
- Stuart McIntyre and Anna Clarke, ‘History Under Fire’ (pp 1-13), ‘Bicentenary Battles’ (pp
Questions for consideration:
Was Australia settled or invaded? Can what happened on the frontier be called ‘war’ or ‘genocide’?
What has been the place of Indigenous people in the Australian nation? Why are these questions so important and so divisive in contemporary Australian society? Why do some Australians feel guilt or shame for past injustices? Why are some hostile to such feelings?

Sites of Pleasure, Histories of Pain: Recreating the Past For Tourists

One of the most common ways in which national histories are consumed is via tourism. Convict tourism and Indigenous tourism have, since the late nineteenth century, been popular activities for visitors, and they remain so today.

Required Readings:

Additional Readings:
- Tom Griffiths, Beechworth: An Australian Country Town and Its Past, Greenhouse, Melbourne, 1987

Film: Uncivilised
Indigenous collection at the Australian Museum on Macquarie St

Questions for consideration:
How can shameful pasts also be objects of tourist consumption? What kinds of history are presented at these places? Are ‘dark’ elements of the past hidden or highlighted? How does convict tourism differ from Indigenous tourism? How are they similar? Can Indigenous culture be considered part of history tourism? What do debates about built heritage say about Australia’s attitude to history?
Session 4

National Pride or National Mourning: The legacy of Gallipoli and World War I

Anzac Day, 25th April, commemorates the landing of Australian soldiers at Gallipoli in Turkey as part of the World War I campaign. It is popularly seen as the moment in which Australian national identity was forged. Lately, the site has become popular with young Australians backpacking around Europe to visit it for the annual dawn service.

Required Readings

2. Marilyn Lake, ‘Introduction: What have you done for your country’ and Joy Damousi, ‘Chapter 4: Why do we get so emotional about Anzac?’ in Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds (eds), What’s Wrong With Anzac: The militarisation of Australian history, New South Press, Sydney, 2010

Additional Readings:
- Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds (eds), What’s Wrong With Anzac: The militarisation of Australian history, New South Press, Sydney, 2010

Film: Gallipoli

Questions for consideration:
Why has Gallipoli been so important in the development of Australian national identity? Does Anzac Day remember or glorify war? How do feminist readings problematise the way in which Anzac is remembered? What were the motives for soldiers enlisting? And how are soldiers and their deaths remembered now?

Session 5

September 27

The Bush Legend: Urbanisation and the Romance of the Bush

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world. More than two-thirds of the population live in major cities, most of these on the east coast. And yet the ‘bush’ and the ‘outback’ have been key ingredients in the Australian imaginary. The bush has been invented as both rural idyll and terrifying dystopia. This week will attempt to make sense of these apparent paradoxes.

Required Readings:

   Also please look at the image gallery at http://www.outbackheritage.com.au/
Additional Readings:
- Marcus Clarke, ‘Preface’ in The Poems of Adam Lindsay Gordon, Messina, Melbourne, 1892.

Films: Sunday Too Far Away, The Proposition, Wolf Creek, Wake In Fright, Picnic At Hanging Rock
The music of Nick Cave, The Drones and Slim Dusty

Questions for consideration:
What is the bush legend? Why has it been so important in creating Australian identity? To what degree is it due to city-based romanticisation? How egalitarian is it? Who and what does it exclude? How does it compare to America’s ‘Frontier Legend’? What other ‘legends’ have constituted Australian identity? Is there an ‘Australian Gothic’ that treats the bush as a site of terror?

This session will include a short field trip to Martin Place and the Art Gallery of NSW. Details TBA.

This week you also need to consult with Toby about your major research essay.

SEMESTER BREAK OCTOBER 1 – 5

Session 6
October 11

Man’s Country: Rage, Feminism and Challenges to the Myths of Masculine Australia

This week we look at how the orthodoxies of the ‘bush legend’, and other myths of masculinist Australia, were challenged by feminist historians and thinkers in the 1970s and the legacy of these challenges.

Required Reading:

Additional Readings:
- Sara Storer, Beautiful Circle
Questions for consideration:
What did feminist historians have to say about Australian history? What did they have to say about the relationship between the past and the present? Did their challenges affect their own society? What is their legacy for feminism in Australia today?

Unit B: Politics and Place
Session 7
October 18

New Chums: Immigration, Assimilation and Multiculturalism

Australia is famously the land of the fair go: egalitarian and open-minded. Yet, for some sixty years it restricted immigration from non-European nations. Today, immigration policy is a fraught political issue and racial tensions still exist within an increasingly multicultural society.

Required Readings:
1. Primary Source: John Howard’s 2001 election campaign speech, especially the three paragraphs that begin ‘So ladies and gentlemen they are some of the new plans we have for Australia’s future...’ And end ‘...we will decide and nobody else who comes to this country.’ http://www.australianpolitics.com/news/2001/01-10-28.shtml
2. Ghassan Hage, ‘Multiculturalism and the Ungovernable Muslim’ (pp 165-186) in Raimond Gaita (ed), Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism, Text, Melbourne, 2011

Additional Readings:

Questions for consideration:
What were the reasons for the White Australia Policy? Why have Asians been seen as incompatible with Australian values? What are the connections between 9/11 and immigration policy? Why are Muslims considered un-governable? What is multiculturalism? Is Australia genuinely multicultural? Is it racist? To what degree is racism invented and inflamed by tabloid media?

Session 8
October 25

Land Management and Land Chaos

Parts of Australian society are currently enjoying the economic benefits of a mining boom. Historically, too, much of Australia’s wealth has derived from its natural resources. Yet mining and forestry raise serious questions of environmental and economic sustainability and of ownership and access (particularly for Indigenous people). Australia always threatens to become the ‘clever country’ rather than the ‘lucky country’, but has it?

Required Readings:
1. Primary Source: Kelsey Munro, ‘Community Gardens Harvest Crop of Happy Little Vegemites’, Sydney Morning Herald, May 15th 2010
2. Bill Gammage, ‘Curious Landscapes’ (pp 5-17) (and also flip through illustrations pp 18-100) in The Biggest Estate on Earth, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2011
**Additional Readings:**

**Questions for consideration:**
How have Australians managed and mis-managed the land? Is the history of Australia one of environmental destruction? To what degree is current interest in landcare linked to global movements? To what degree is it a local issue? What is meant by the terms ‘lucky country’ and ‘clever country’? So Australians love their land? Do they fear it?

This week will include a field trip to the Observatory in the Rocks.

**Session 9**

**November 1**

**Private Acts in Public Spaces: Gay Rights and the Sydney Mardi Gras**

**Required Readings:**

**Additional Readings:**
- Film: *Head On*

**Questions For Consideration:**
How have gay rights been fought for in Australia? What is the general consensus on gay marriage? How does it differ/coincide with America? What is the power of street protest? What are its limitations? To what degree are lesbians a visible part of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras?

**Session 10**

**November 8**

**Drinking Cultures: State Control and Subversion**

Australians love a drink, but do they have a drinking ‘problem’? The Australian state certainly has a problematic relationship with alcohol. On the one hand, it derives significant revenue from taxation, on the other it has sought to restrict access to alcohol on the grounds of morality, health and race. And Australian society often has very different ideas about how and how much women should drink, as opposed to men.

**Required Readings:**
1. Primary source: Michael Thorn, ‘Alcohol in Cross-Hairs but Premier Gun-Shy’, *Sydney*
3. Robert Gosford, ‘They took our culture, now there is no law: life under the NT Intervention’, Overland, No 202, Autumn 2011, pp29-34.

Additional Readings:
- Tanja Luckins, ‘Pigs, hogs and Aussie blokes: the emergence of the term ‘six o’clock swill’, History Australia, 4:1, June 2007, 8.1-08.17
- The song ‘Cut A Rug’ by Dougie Young on Buried Country

Questions for consideration:
How can we characterise Australian society’s attitude to alcohol? How does it differ according to race, social class and gender? How does alcohol disrupt communities? How does it bring them together?

Unit C: Culture and Consumption
Session 11
15th November

The Mouth: Food and Language

Required Readings:
1. Primary Source: Look at the rhetoric of ‘food safaris’ such as: http://www.gourmetsafaris.com.au/cart/sydney_safaris.php

Additional Readings:

Episodes of SBS’ Food Safari
Film: Finished People

Questions for consideration:
How have new migrants sought to feel ‘at home’ in Australia? To what degree has the state accommodated these desires? How are non-white, non-western cultures consumed by white Australia? To what degree are such cultures ‘exotic’? To what degree are they ‘normal’?

This week will also include a field trip and lunch at a restaurant. Details TBA
Session 12
The Ear: Music, Poetry and Place
November 22

Required Readings:
1. Primary sources: This week in class we will listen to some songs that articulate a sense of place and use them as a jumping off point for discussion. But in preparation you could listen to some relevant Australian music, i.e. ‘Wide Open Road’ by the Triffids, ‘Cattle and Cane’ by the Go-Betweens and ‘My Island Home’ by the Warumpi Band.

Additional Readings:
• Philip Hayward (ed), From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992.
• Brian Elliott, ‘Jindyworobaks and Aborigines’, Australian Literary Studies, 8:1, 1977, pp 29-50

Questions for consideration:
How has popular music in Australia articulated a sense of place? How do different types of music do it differently? How has white music and literature appropriated an Indigenous sense of place? To what degree is Australian music ‘local’? To what degree is it ‘global’?

Session 13
The Eye: Cinema, Television, Humour and the Grotesque
November 29

Required Readings/Viewing:
1. Primary source: the film Muriel’s Wedding. We will also watch and discuss clips of tv comedy in class.

Additional Readings/Viewing:
Episodes of Summer Heights High and Kath and Kim, An audience with Dame Edna Everage

Questions for consideration:
How are we to make sense of the prevalence of satire, grotesquerie and cross-dressing in Australian humour? Is it funny? Is it demeaning? What do ‘Summer Heights High’, ‘Kath and Kim’ and Barry Humphries’ live shows say about gender and class? Do such performances encourage us to laugh ‘with’ or ‘at’ bogans? Is Australian humour inclusionary or exclusionary?

Session 14
The Body: Sport, the Beach, Masculinities and Femininities
December 6

Required Readings:
1. Primary source: ‘Calls for respect after criticism of swimmer’s weight’, New York Times, July 26th 2012 (and please clink on the links embedded in the Times article.)

**Additional Readings:**
- Film: *Puberty Blues*

**Questions for consideration:**
Are sports-people’s bodies considered to be the property of the nation? How do Australians look at sports-people? How do they look at women’s bodies differently to men’s bodies? And white bodies differently to black bodies? To what degree is beach behaviour and dress ‘culture’? Can you map the ‘zones of undress’ at Bondi Beach?

Your major research essay is due this week.

**Session 15**

No class. Essays will be available for collection.

**13th December**

**Classroom Etiquette**
This is a seminar subject and requires active participation. It also requires respectful and engaged discussion, including listening to and respecting other points of view. Eating is not permitted in any classrooms. Please kindly dispose of rubbish in the bins provided.

**Required Co-curricular Activities**
Field trips are scheduled throughout the semester.

**Suggested Co-curricular Activities**

**Your Instructor**
Dr Toby Martin is an historian and musician. Since finishing his PhD at the University of Sydney in 2011 - titled 'Yodelling Boundary Riders: Country Music in Australia, 1936-2010' - Toby has published several articles on country music and its intersections with modernity, national identities and gender. He was the 2011 ‘Folk Fellow’ at the National Library of Australia where he researched the music of Dougie Young and other Indigenous songwriters from western New South Wales and formed a band, with Young's grandson, to perform these songs. Toby is currently working on an ARC-funded project on the history of tourism in Australia and, after many years playing in rock band Youth Group, he has recently released a solo album called 'Love's Shadow'.