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Abstract: The so called History Wars in Australia represent an ongoing conflict between (broadly) conservative and progressivist groups over the modern origins of white, European Australia and the behaviour of Australia's modern founders in regard to the indigenous peoples. The History Wars have also been an integral feature of the Culture War conflicts in Australia of recent years and of the consequent attacks on the 'liberal' university.
THE AUSTRALIAN HISTORY WARS AS CULTURE WAR: 
THE STRUGGLE FOR MEMORY, IDENTITY AND TRUTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE 
MODERN UNIVERSITY

The History Wars in Australia have seen (broadly defined) liberal-progressives and conservatives clashing over the question of Australia’s European origins and their implications for present and future Australian identity. The traditional/conservative understanding of Australia’s past emphasises the extraordinary achievements of convict and settler communities in surviving and ultimately prospering in a harsh, unforgiving and alien land. It acknowledges that Aboriginal peoples were living and moving freely throughout the continent at the time of European arrival (1788) and that significant conflict took place as utterly different, almost totally incomprehensible cultures confronted each other. The result of this conflict, it argues, was a tragic but historical inevitability, which saw the indigenous peoples defeated as much by a cultural incapacity to adapt to the changing realities of modern existence as by force of arms.

Conservative historians and other adherents to this traditional perspective do not deny the brutality and racially motivated activities of some individuals and groups in the murders and dispossession of Aboriginal peoples from their lands, during the 18th and 19th centuries, but they strongly reject the notion that from its beginning modern Australian society was based upon the systematic imposition of Imperialist force, deeply embedded racism and crude materialist principles. A much better representation of the essential Australian character, it is suggested, is to be found in the early 20th century, in the courage, sacrifice and selfless mateship of the Australian diggers during WW1, at Gallipoli and on the Western front in particular. This ANZAC tradition remains for conservatives, in particular, the contemporary keystone of cultural unity and national identity, the historical foundation for a strong, resourceful and prosperous Australia in an always dangerous and threatening world.

This traditionalist historical narrative effectively became the ‘truth’ for generations of Australians, through school texts and authoritative historical writings - a largely unquestioned orthodoxy until scholars such as Manning Clark and Henry Reynolds began to question its veracity during the 1970s and 1980s. There has been no attempt from
this quarter or any other to seek to undermine the story of gallantry and sacrifice associated with the original ANZACs at Gallipoli, though there have long been concerns in progressivist circles about the broader ANZAC legend and its role in shaping a particular kind of cultural and geo-political identity for Australia. Above all there is concern that the legend of the ANZACs has taken on a cultural reverence which disallows critical assessment of it and of the dangers associated with a national story of identity centred on futile military sacrifice in the service of a far away imperialist power. These concerns have been much more explicit in progressivist attacks upon the conservative historical narrative in regard to the earlier period of white, European possession of the Australian continent.

This process, argue liberal historians, was not a case of tragic inevitability brought on by a primitive Aboriginal culture or the odd case of miscreant behaviour on the part of convicts and settlers. At its core it was about imperialist and colonialist practices and an associated official indifference to the fate of indigenous peoples. And in many areas (particularly in Queensland and Tasmania) it was about the racist savagery of white settlers engaged in the genocidal cleansing of the Australian frontier.

A concentration on the ANZAC legend as the foundation of national identity effectively displaces this memory of murderous appropriation at the core of the Australian historical narrative. But, according to progressivist historians, it does a disservice to the search for accurate representations of Australia's past and concerns about contemporary Australian society and culture.

It is in this broad context that the various skirmishes of the Australian History Wars have taken place - initially and primarily in the books, articles and academic conferences where professional historians commonly engage each other in their (traditionally restrained) debates over Australia's past. On this issue, however, there has been an uncharacteristic bitterness inherent in the struggle over memory, identity and truth among Australian historians.

Since the early 1990s this bitterness has become more evident as debates, once the preserve of lecture halls and academic journals, have spilled over into the public domain and as powerful protagonists from the political realm and from the corporate
sector and the media have been drawn to the fray. In these expanded confrontations the broader nature and deeper implications of the History Wars have become increasingly clear to a wider Australian audience.

As I will seek to illustrate in this paper, this is primarily because the History Wars were never just squabbles over historical detail between professional historians. There are more profound issues at stake here, issues that do tend to engender bitterness - as intrinsic features of the larger Culture War confrontations of the past two decades in Australia.

In this regard they are part of the ongoing struggle to 'maintain the power to define reality' ¹ within Australian society during a period when the traditional Australian narrative of national identity has come under widespread challenge. They are, in this broader context, struggles to install a particular 'way of life' - conflicts over fundamental values regarding issues of right and wrong, truth and falsity, reality and unreality, in particular regarding Australia's real national identity. ²

It is in this expanded context that I want to address the Australian History Wars issue in relation to the central ISA conference theme for 2009 - concerning questions of past, present and future. More specifically, this paper is concerned with the implications of different, competing understandings of the past for our sense of political and cultural identity in the present.

It is, in this sense, a struggle for memory with a great political and cultural prize at its core. The prize? - the right to shape the future in line with the reality of the past. In this case a reality perceived as integral to a Western intellectual tradition now under widespread attack in liberal societies and most profoundly in liberal universities.

Rarely is the debate over the Australian History Wars represented in these terms. But when it is it becomes abundantly clear what is at stake in this conflict, particularly for those on the conservative (and neo-conservative) side of the struggle. In the work of

² Hunter, ibid
Keith Windschuttle, for example, the concern to sustain a particular kind of memory about Australia's origins is imbued with the kind of passionately obdurate approach to truth and reality reminiscent of conflict in the American Culture Wars. This is perhaps not so surprising given that Windschuttle has the ideological pedigree of many of the iconic neo-conservatives - initially a Marxist and then a dogmatic spokesperson for the right in their struggles with the liberal progressive 'elite'.

Windschuttle is the most controversial figure in the Australian History Wars - celebrated by conservative politicians and the Murdoch press for his unremitting attacks on the 'Aboriginal guilt industry' and postmodernists in the universities - despised by liberals for his indiscriminate and often personalised attacks on historians who question the orthodox perspective on Australia's past.

The conflicts between liberal historians and Windschuttle and his supporters is an issue for more detailed exploration later. More important for now is the foundation of Windschuttle’s thinking - which locates the History Wars conflicts as a struggle for objective truth and the 'Western' cultural tradition from which it arises.

This foundation was outlined in a 1994 book The Killing of History, and in subsequent articles aimed at postmodernist influences within the Australian history profession. His attack was typically indiscriminate. Foucault and Derrida were obvious enough targets, but Thomas Kuhn was also denounced and so too Karl Popper, for acknowledging the need for pre-observational hypotheses in the process of examining and verifying evidence and for acknowledging ‘contingent truth’ as the basis of scientific knowledge. This was all part of a destructive modern relativism, Windschuttle maintained, which was overturning a Western intellectual tradition stretching back to the Greeks of the 5th century BC.

This tradition - the apprehension of fact and truth in apolitical, ahistorical, acultural terms - was originated by Thucydides, he argues, and is a unique characteristic of Western culture. It is this tradition, according to Windschuttle, that is under threat from relativist historians, who don’t understand that:
there are facts about the past which we know from history, that
the past is not merely an invention of the present but is
something that happened quite independently of those of us
who have inherited its consequences. 3

This is what the History Wars are about, he insists, because it distinguishes those who
are fighting it. Thus, in a liberal-relativist age:

If you believe in truth and objectivity you reveal yourself as a
conservative. If you reject these concepts you become a
radical. From this latter perspective has emerged the most
influential single idea: the notion that history is inescapably
political.

Above all, the liberal politicisation of history must be exposed and confronted in the
Australian History Wars, he argues, because it allows liberal historians to fabricate
Aboriginal history and denigrate British colonialism in so doing - all for radical purposes
in the current era. Conservatives must fight this process, not just because of its
impact upon Australian society and identity but because:

it is a conflict that goes all the way to the core of Western
culture. For if we deny the possibility of discovering knowledge
through historical investigation we throw away some of our
most powerful intellectual equipment. 4

Suffice for now to say that the position taken by Windschuttle here - and invoked
enthusiastically by Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007) and a bevy of supporters
from the corporate world and the media - is one instantly familiar to anyone aware of
the debates in the humanities and social sciences of the 1980s and 1990s. In the
history field it continues a controversy sparked in the 19th century by Von Ranke’s
proposition that history must match the natural sciences in discovering ‘the past as it
actually occurred’. It traverses complex issues of ontology and epistemology and in
the academic sphere it has seen empiricists and positivists confronting various species
of post-positivists over the possibility of objective knowledge.

3 ‘History, truth and postmodernism’ in Capitalist Magazine at
http://www.capmag.com/article.asp?ID=2347
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This is not a debate I want to revisit in this paper, except perhaps to reiterate a theme introduced at the apex of the quest for objective knowledge, in theoretical physics decades ago which, in Heisenberg’s terms, proposes that ‘in atomic physics observations can no longer be objectified...the science of nature does not deal with nature itself but in fact with the science of nature as man thinks it and describes it.’

This point, which Popper understood and which a figure such as Windschuttle appears not to, is that entirely objective knowledge is regarded as unattainable even in the most scientifically sophisticated of environments - hardly the preserve of the Australian historian sifting through old untrustworthy documents written in politically volatile times about questions of murder and territorial dispossession.

A few commentators have addressed this issue, albeit obliquely, in suggesting more prosaic reasons for Windschuttle’s ignorance of the issues in question. John Quiggin proposing that:

Windschuttle admits that some documents are untrustworthy...but apparently right thinking people like himself are gifted with a special insight that enables them to dispense with the fallibilism of ‘irrationalists’ like Popper and go straight to the truth. Most importantly, Windschuttles model enables him to disregard oral evidence, even from eyewitnesses, thereby ruling out of court almost the whole of the Aboriginal side of Australian history.

The more nuanced of Liberal historians tend to acknowledge the limitation on objectivity, accepting that there is no ‘history’ that is independent of the way we give meaning to it, in the present. Or, more specifically, that our knowledge of past, present and future can never be totally independent of the way we interpret it, that because our interpretations of real things (events/facts/evidence) are always politically and culturally grounded they are often contested, sometimes violently so. Accordingly, rethinking the past is always a politically charged enterprise.

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As recent events have illustrated the struggle for memory can have stark and tragic consequences in many areas of the contemporary world. In the Balkans, for example, or in Rwanda where control over cultural and ethnic memory became the rationale for genocidal practice in the 1990s. It can have violent and politically traumatic outcomes also in advanced societies such as the US during the Culture Wars and especially since 9/11, 2001, where the attacks on liberals in the university sector in particular are underpinned by an appeal for one, unified, unquestioned narrative of American history and identity as integral to its ‘war on terror’.8

The struggle for memory associated with the Australian History Wars does not, thankfully, have the same kind of consequences, although figures such as Windschuttle and Howard and their supporters, undoubtedly seek the ‘one narrative’ outcome for Australia as the basis of a unified cultural and political identity - after the Cold War and in the age of the ‘war on terror’.

This struggle for memory for Australian conservatives was given its particular edge by the interventions in the History Wars debate of Paul Keating and his powerful reformulations of the traditional narratives of Australia’s past (e.g. the aboriginal genocide question) and its future (e.g, the question of Anglo-Celtic identity in a changing regional and global landscape).

The subsequent confrontations between two Prime Ministers, Keating (1992-1996) and Howard (1996-2007) on these issues during the 1990s I will represent in this paper as emblematic of the broader antagonisms of the Australian History/Culture Wars. These antagonisms have seen the liberal university again become a flashpoint of contention, as conservatives have rekindled the post-Vietnam attacks on Arts and Humanities Schools as havens of progressivist radicalism - as no longer trustworthy of their status as the foremost repository of memory and truth and the ‘western’ tradition.

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8 See S. McClennan, ‘The Geopolitical War on Higher Education’, in College Literature 33.4 (Fall 2006)
The Keating (progressivist) provocations

In the 1990s Keating wanted to accelerate the transformation of Australian society and its economy from its perceived status as an Anglo-Celtic cultural outpost - a haven of economic protectionism, social conservatism and racism - to a dynamic neo-liberal state in the Asia Pacific. He understood that the cultural power necessary to drive this transformation depended upon his capacity to break down the deeply embedded influence of the traditional narratives of Australia’s past. His intervention in the History Wars thus implored a reassessment and progressivist re-casting of the dominant Australian story of its origins, development and national identity.

In particular, he argued, Australians must acknowledge the genocidal intent inherent in its dispossession of its indigenous peoples - as part of a British imperialist strategy worldwide. It must acknowledge this as part of a larger acknowledgement of the role played by a small (Protestant, wealthy, Anglophile) elite in framing the past in ways that best served its interests. And, above all, Australians must understand that there is another story - a radical history of Australian development - which tells of the struggles of Australia’s working peoples to overcome Anglophile dominance and create an egalitarian democracy - a story of achievement accomplished largely despite the British legacy not because of it. A story that contains within it the individual and collective potentials of a great 21st century society - a culturally independent society.

Keating believed that the world was changing fundamentally in the 1990s - from a static Cold War frame of reference to a fluid, dynamic world of de-regulated markets and social and political interdependence. Australia, he argued, could not compete in this world of the future until it began to confront the stories it told itself about its past - about its national character and about what it could achieve in the world as an independent actor - particularly in its Asia Pacific neighbourhood where its future prosperity and development lay.

The History Wars had to be won for Keating in order that Australia’s conservative Anglophile culture might be overturned and the political and economic wars of the (possibly non-Western) future might be won in progressivist fashion.

\[9\] In this sense Keating was articulating the radical nationalist perspectives of Manning Clark in particular
The Howard (conservative) response

Howard also joined the History Wars to win the future - but also to defend the British and Western legacies of the past. For Howard the keystone of success in both contexts lay in the retention of a conservative culture in Australia - and indeed in the rescuing of it from a progressivist onslaught in politics, within the liberal media and particularly in the universities.

The power to define contemporary reality and defend Western values for Howard thus lay in the capacity to re-establish and strengthen the traditional Australian narrative - the story of the successful transplantation of British culture in an alien and hostile environment. A story of great suffering and sacrifice, but of the eventual triumph of Judaeo-Christian principles, of capitalist endeavour and of an egalitarianism based on a socially conservative value system.

A crucial difference between Howard's chosen narrative and that of Keating concerned the fate of the indigenous peoples under European conquest. More specifically, there was in Howard's traditional narrative no reason for contemporary Australians to feel guilt about their national or ethnic lineage, no reason either for them to radically restructure their cultural frame of reference in order to face the challenges of a neoliberal future in their region or in the wider world.

There had been tragic confrontations with Aboriginal peoples, he acknowledged, but their fate was sealed primarily by their primitiveness and an inability to culturally adapt to rapid change in the modern world. This was vital for Australians to understand, Howard argued, in order that they resist the attempts of liberal-progressives to impose guilt upon them, to undermine confidence in traditional Australian values and to dilute Australia's (Western) national identity and its traditional alliances in regionalist arrangements with Asia-Pacific nations.

It was in these terms that Howard most explicitly and most passionately interwove central issues of the History Wars with the larger contestations of the Australian (and American) Culture Wars, drawing significantly upon American neo-conservative perspectives in so doing. And it was with these themes in mind that activists from
within the conservative sectors of Australian society - from the corporate sector and from the right-wing media in particular - followed the prime ministers lead in disputing progressivist accounts of Australia's past, present and future.

This is another theme I will address in more detail later. The discussion to follow more immediately seeks to establish a broader intellectual context for this debate and for the Australian History Wars more generally. It begins, consequently, with a brief account of the Culture Wars issue in its US and Australian articulations. It then touches more directly upon the Australian History Wars, the Aboriginal question and the associated conflicts inside and outside the university.

Culture War: a brief reprise
There are relatively simple ways of explaining the conflicts of the Culture Wars as, for example, strategies of 'wedge politics' designed to split off different cultural groups from each other, for political advantage. A Culture War in this sense is a process of 'shaping and mobilising certain values in order to win elections.' 10 But Culture War antagonisms go deeper than this and the wedge politics strategy, effective as it might be, is a surface representation of a more profound phenomena in societies such as the US and Australia.

Indeed, John Fonte has argued that Culture Wars are about perennial issues of human society, concerning the status of truth, questions of authority and the nature of the good, moral society - about 'everything that matters' in both traditional and modern societies. 11 A culture, understood this way, represents the social, political and philosophical elements by which reality is defined - the ideas, belief systems, values and institutions by which people give meaning to their lives, interpret its reality and construct their identity in relation to others.

A 'culture war' exists in this sense when conflicting cultures, driven primarily by their intellectual elites, are engaged in protracted conflict for cultural hegemony - for the hearts and minds of the great majority of people and for the levers of power by which

10 D. Mcknight, Beyond Right and Left (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005) p.136
a dominant culture might operationalise its images of the good life. This is clearly far more than a debate over footnotes in a history text.

Elsewhere, I have spoken of the modern origins of the Culture Wars in the attempts by the old left in the 1920s and 1930s to explain the incapacity of Marxism to win the hearts and minds of the modern masses.  

This crisis of the old left saw appeals for a 'culture war' to overturn the influences of liberal-capitalist thought and help emancipate the modern working classes from the hegemony of modern class rule.

Antonio Gramsci is important in this regard in pointing to the process by which hegemonic power is operationalised in powerful but seemingly politically neutral spaces - in schools, universities, parliamentary systems and in family structures - where 'natural' hierarchies validate gendered power relations and traditional modes of thought and behaviour while invalidating social critique and radical political inclinations.

In the 1960s and 1970s these themes were taken up in various ways, and with differing degrees of coherence, by a New Left concerned to open up Western societies to radical ways of thinking and acting at another moment of political and cultural crisis. For the most part these cultural revolutionaries were the sons and daughters of the post-WW2 era of affluence responding to what they saw as the nightmarish qualities of the American dream. Provoked by a sense of social and political torpor amid suburban prosperity they demanded fundamental change to American society on issues of race, class, gender and social values. Above all, and simultaneously, the counter-culture movements demanded an end to the war in Vietnam and to what was perceived as a brutal and immoral intervention into a small third World country.

For many this engagement with political radicalism was little more than youthful self indulgence, for some it triggered off a lifetime of activism concerned with radically changing traditional American culture. For those most attuned to the old left Culture War project it marked an opportunity to emphasise the 'false consciousness' intrinsic

to the US education system (e.g. CW Mills); the one dimensionality of American middle class existence (e.g. Herbert Marcuse); and the brutality of its global hegemonic project (e.g. W.A. Williams). From this radical New Left position the answer to America's troubles, both internally and in foreign policy terms, did indeed reside in Gramscian style counter-hegemonic struggles with the dominant culture.

Not surprisingly, the conservative backlash sought to defend its positions along the battlefronts of the developing Culture War. The attack on bourgeois American society was fiercely rebutted. It was not one dimensional, conservatives insisted, but it did have a number of principles intrinsic to it which could not be compromised by the demands of a secular, relativist liberal-left - in particular those aimed at undermining traditional attitudes toward religion, the family and moral values.\(^\text{14}\) These were principles intrinsic also to the kind of strong, unified and patriotic society that liberal-progressives were seeking to undermine in regard to American foreign policy - which must therefore be even more strongly resisted. The conflict with liberalism internally thus became integral to the conflicts over US and western Cold War strategy.\(^\text{15}\)

Particular attention was paid to the education system and to universities in this conservative backlash, a system, it was argued, dominated by the liberal and radical ideologies of the counter-culture years and increasingly compromised by a shallow modern egalitarianism at the expense of the Western tradition and its intellectual canon.\(^\text{16}\)

By the Reagan era of the 1980s some of the more traditional conservative factions were already in tenuous association with an emerging (neo-conservative) New Right, which has been integral to the Culture War assaults on liberal progressivism since then. At the forefront of their critical attention has been the so called 'new class', liberal professionals, bureaucrats and activists, in government and the arts, and in education in particular, charged with seeking to destroy the very system that has provided them the ideological freedom to do so.

\(^{14}\) See G. Himmelfarb, *One Nation, Two Cultures*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999)
During the first Administration of George W. Bush (2000-2004) this Culture War strategy was at its most effective with its powerful amalgam of neo-conservative and evangelical supporters prominent across its many battlegrounds. Since 2004 this pragmatic coalition has fractured to some extent amid the widespread condemnation of the Bush administration over the war in Iraq and the meltdown of the US economic system in 2008.

For all this the result of the Culture Wars in the US is, as one commentator has put, an ‘America more bitterly divided than it has been for a generation’,... [in which] ‘you've got 80% or 90% of the country that looks at each other like they are from a different planet’. 17 An Australian commentator, Don Watson, reiterated this view whilst traversing the US during the 2008 election campaign. ‘It might just be the election' he mused, ‘but the US seems even more divided than it did two years ago, by race, religion, class and ideology...It is as if one large slice of the population does not recognise the other slice’. 18

The polarisation into ‘red’ (heartland, conservative) and ‘blue’ (coastal, liberal) states has been designated (rightly) as an over-simplification - and indeed some high quality recent literature proposes that the culture wars are actually over in the US. 19 However, the ‘Palin factor’ in the US elections of 2008 indicated something else, as did Barak Obama's struggles with the white working class, which was more than just an issue of race but went to his perceived ‘elite’ status and his progressivist perspectives on social issues and foreign policy in particular.

This is no surprise to John Fonte, who argues that Culture War antagonisms are so embedded in societies like the US, with apparent middle class convergence, that just below the surface ‘an intense ideological struggle is being waged between two competing worldviews’. A struggle so intense that it will rage in the US for he

19 See, for example, J.D. Hunter and A.Wolfe, *Is There a Culture War?* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 2006)
foreseeable future ‘regardless of who becomes president tomorrow, or four or eight or even twenty years from now’. \textsuperscript{20}

The post-materialist dimension
Brink Lindsay’s ‘post-materialist’ perspectives in \textit{The Age of Abundance} (2007) provides another dimension on this issue. Lindsay argues that peoples in rich societies, such as the US and Australia, have crossed a great historic threshold - from the age of scarcity to the age of abundance. The majority of peoples in these societies have thus been liberated from the great preoccupation with material survival - the pursuit of adequate food, shelter and clothing - allowing them unimagined freedoms in a time of economic prosperity, self-realisation and, importantly, cultural reassessment.

During the counter-culture era this saw the civil rights movements, feminist movements and environmentalists changing social rules and attitudes, and pushing beyond the boundaries of traditional morality. Much was gained by this, for individuals and for society more generally, as old strictures gave way to freer, more tolerant communities. On the other hand the American mainstream remained largely resistant to the appeals of the cultural revolution and conservative groups were appalled by it. Indeed, at its end, Lindsey maintains, there were even greater divisions in US society than before it.

In particular there was an enlarged cultural schism between an educated, skilled and adventurous sector of the middle class - stimulated by the opportunities for self-realisation and political change - and great masses of working people and the burgeoning underclass which acknowledged the value of some elements of the change agenda, but which felt alienated from its perceived hedonism and fearful of its implications for ‘American values’ and America’s place in the world.

It was never quite as simple as this, of course, with many within the ‘liberal’ sectors also feeling the anxieties associated with rapid cultural change while not all with social conservatives condemned the greater scope for self and social expression. But in

general terms this bifurcated scenario became crucial to the conservative backlash in the Culture Wars. Accordingly, Republican Administrations in the US (1980-1992 and 2000-2008) and Liberal Party governments in Australia (1996-2007) along with their supporters, have defined the conflicts as a clash of incommensurable ‘values’ between a liberal progressivist elite - centred in the universities, the media and the Arts and still driven by New Left ideology - and a socially conservative majority comprising the ‘real’ people and articulating a traditional wisdom about aspiration and limitation in the good modern society.

The neo-conservative right have been particularly skilled in this enterprise, strategically positioning itself in that space in opposition to the progressive elites, as the champions of the socially conservative working class, on questions of religion, morality and national identity in particular, in the post materialist age.

The Australian Culture Wars
This ‘post-materialist’ theme has also been related to the Australian Culture Wars where, it’s argued, its implications have been similar to those in the US. 21Hence, Australians since the 1970s have been engaging the ‘realm of freedom’ in both celebratory and anxiety ridden terms - often simultaneously. In the ensuing period Australians have seen their traditional social and sexual relations under challenge, their workplaces redefined and their national and international identities reformulated. This has created a ‘different’ Australia in many respects - a more dynamic, diverse and tolerant Australia and for great numbers of working class people, in particular, a more prosperous Australia.

Simultaneously though it has created an anxious Australia - an Australia anxious about family stability and traditional ideas of marriage, and about personal and social identity - between men and women, parents and children, and between different generations. There is enhanced anxiety too about security in the emerging new Australia - about job security in a globalising world - about physical security as traditional communities breakdown and newer, less familiar ones take their place.

Australians have become increasingly anxious also about national security, as alien ideas and peoples and religions become part of the threat scenarios advanced by the media and security analysts.  

At the core of the Culture Wars since the 1980s has been an anxiety within its socially conservative working classes - about the fate of Australia’s Anglo-Celtic history and culture, and the traditional value agenda by which ordinary Australians have understood themselves and their place in the world. It was this anxiety, in particular, that was increased when Paul Keating sought to accelerate the pace of social and political change in Australia to take advantage of perceived opportunities in the neoliberal world order at the end of the Cold War era.

Australia must seize the moment, Keating insisted, to move beyond its imperialist past and become a truly independent republic; to go beyond its racist past, and embrace a multicultural future; to overcome its fear of Asia and integrate itself into the cultures and societies of the Asia-Pacific, particularly that of Indonesia. Above all it must confront the silences in its national memory over its treatment of the first Australians, before it could move forward culturally and morally into a future full of new challenges.

A speech Keating gave at Sydney’s Redfern Park in 1992 encapsulates the progressivist position on indigenous issues in this context. Speaking directly to a large Aboriginal audience Keating insisted that the truth now be told by Europeans - a truth that began with an act of recognition:

Response that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.  

22 M. Pusey, op cit
Keating's 'truth' and his enthusiasm for radical change was shared by many in the Australian community who applauded his courage and commitment to the Aboriginal cause in particular. It was exemplary progressivism and it delighted the left-liberal sectors of the Australian community even while they remained sceptical of his neo-liberal project.

But this was not an enthusiasm shared by the anxious majority. Consequently, in the 1996 Federal elections Keating's ALP was defeated in a landslide victory by Howard's conservatives who received major support from traditional ALP voters making clear their fear and loathing of Keating's cultural change scenario and his position in the History Wars.

On its ascension to power, however, the party of the conservatives under Howard illustrated that Keating was absolutely right about what was at stake in the History Wars - that it was indeed a major battleground in the Antipodean theatre of the Culture Wars, that this was a contest over competing realities - over different 'ways of life'.

Howard, in particular, understood this and utilised 'wedge politics' strategies drawn from US neo-conservatism to thwart progressivist influence. At its most obvious this saw Howard dichotomising Australian society between his ordinary 'battlers' and an out of touch intellectual elite. On one side there was the 'political correctness' of the elites seeking to suppress everyday Australian attitudes and values, and on the other, 'families battling to get ahead...young Australians battling to get a start...older Australians battling to preserve their dignity'.24 This was the real Australia Howard pronounced, not the critically obsessed 'postmodern' Australia imagined by Keating and liberal-progressives.

On the Aboriginal issue Howard developed this theme astutely and effectively, assuring mainstream Australians that there was nothing to be anxious about anymore that, in particular, they should 'feel comfortable and relaxed about their history'. More

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24 Howard, cited ibid, p. 153
specifically, he added, Australian's should reject the 'black armband' view of history propounded by liberal historians:

To ensure that our history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that Australians should apologise for most of it. The 'black armband' view of our past reflects a belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. I take a very different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed.

If Keating's Redfern speech epitomised the progressivist position in the Australian History Wars, this response by Howard established the conservative case. It also effectively declared open Culture War on liberal historians and on universities which taught their 'black armband' version of Australia's past. During the Howard era (1996-2007) this emboldened conservatives across the Australian community in their attacks on liberal Aboriginal history and on the liberal university.

In the final section of the paper I want to explore this issue more directly, initially by saying something about the 'discovery' of Aboriginal history in Australia's universities and then about the History Wars associated with it. The discussion ends by touching on some of the broader issues this all raises for the modern university in the contemporary era.

Silent no more: Aboriginal history and the struggle for truth, memory and identity

In 1968 an Australian Anthropologist, Bill Stanner, spoke of a 'great silence' in Australian history scholarship, on the fate of 'several hundred thousand Aborigines who lived and died between 1788 and 1938'. The more general issue of aboriginal dispossession he noted was already reduced to a 'melancholy footnote in the dominant narrative', if it was mentioned at all. 25

25 W. Stanner, After the Dreaming (Sydney: ABC, 1991) p.25
For Stanner this was a silence that no longer could to be tolerated and its political connotations were obvious enough. The point, he argued, was that ‘inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape’. It was, he considered, ‘a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale’ by those who wrote about Australian history and society.  

But by 1968, during the most radical period of the Australian counter culture era, Stanner believed that this was about to change, that a new generation of historians were set to challenge the great ‘silence’ in the Australian national narrative as many other such narratives were now being challenged around the western world.

The Vietnam War was indeed revolutionising the writing and teaching of Australian history. New forms of progressive history took hold among scholars and students. Some of it utilized orthodox Marxian analysis to illustrate the class basis of Australia’s past; some invoked Gramscian insights to indicate the bourgeois nature of the Australian left; a feminist history emerged which traced the (often silenced) achievements of women in Australian history; and other social histories were given a voice, which spoke of ethnicity and race and sexuality as intrinsic features of the story of Australia’s past. For all their differences these new approaches were all concerned with ‘history from below’ - they all sought to speak to the silences in Australian history, to emancipate the stories and the memories effectively ignored in its dominant traditions.  

It was now that the silenced story of Australian Aboriginals, lamented by Stanner, was given a voice as historians ventured into that silence to explore the hidden Australia that Stanner had sought to expose. What they found had, by the 1980s and 1990s, become the tinder box of the History Wars.

The Australian history wars and the aboriginal question
By the 1980s liberal historians and the Hawke ALP government (1983-1992) were agreed that something must be done to compensate Aboriginal peoples for the damage done to them after European settlement. Increasingly there were claims of

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26 Ibid pp. 24-25
27 S. Macintyre, ibid pp. 40-41
institutionalised racism in their past treatment, and during the 1970s the Whitlam government (1972-1975) had introduced land rights legislation to help dispossessed people reclaim some of their tribal lands.

In the early 1980s this concern increased as evidence emerged of the forced separation of children from their parents and of the startling numbers of Aboriginal deaths in custody. This, added to the new awareness and respect for Aboriginal art and ancient culture, meant that the issue of Aboriginal Australians was no longer 'silenced.' It also meant that progressives and conservatives were now confronting each other directly on the question of Australia's origins and Aboriginal history.

The bi-centenary watershed
The tensions came to a head over arrangements for the celebration of the bi-centenary of British settlement (1988). Even the marketing theme for the event created controversy and hostility. After a protracted and complicated process, the Hawke government finally agreed on the term 'living together' as appropriate for the event in paying tribute to the first Australians as well as to its contemporary culture.

This now provoked anger among the emerging neo-conservative right in particular. 28 The problem, it was argued, was that the theme 'neglected the Christian and British foundations of Australia' and the 'core values' of the majority of its people. 29 The mining magnate Hugh Morgan took up this theme. Already angered by the threat of land rights on his rich mining properties, Morgan invoked Christianity as a basis for not celebrating Aboriginal culture which would be a 'a symbolic step back to the world of paganism, superstition, fear and blackness.' More pointedly, Morgan now made the claim that was to create such bitterness a decade later - that all the talk about genocide against Aboriginals was a historical fiction constructed by radical historians to salve 'white middle class guilt'. 30

28 See the essays in R. Manne ed. The New Conservatism in Australia (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982)
This atmosphere pervaded another confrontation which took place over the bicentenary plan to stage a First Fleet re-enactment on Sydney Harbour. Liberals generally saw it as a ‘tasteless and insensitive farce’. The conservative press pronounced it ‘a brilliant and challenging idea’ which focused attention on the historical debt owed to Britain. It was, according to the conservative historian Geoffrey Blainey, ‘a triumph for the silent majority’ over the political and intellectual elite’. 31

This theme was taken up increasingly by those drawing upon American neo-conservatism to confront liberal progressives, now represented as ‘a new class of privileged, disaffected parasites’. 32 At the core of ‘new class’ disaffection, they argued, were the liberal universities where the student radicals of the counter-culture years had now ensconced themselves and were infusing students with a ‘paranoid hatred of authority’ and a contempt for ‘the societies leading values and institutions’. 33 These ‘self hating’ academics, it was claimed, were proffering an ideology of multiculturalism and republicanism ‘and a noble savage mystique of the Australian Aboriginal which fully caters to white guilt and black vengeance’. 34 Blainey weighed in, pointing to a ‘certain form of socialism ...in some classrooms and university departments’ as the core of the problem. 35

Building upon this critique neo-conservatives at the free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) insisted that the bi-centenary must reject progressivism in all its forms and articulate the ‘core values’ of the real Australian society, including its ‘Christian tradition, its British heritage, its alliance with the US, its work ethic, its family values, private enterprise and the Monarchy’. Anything less would be to give in to the Aboriginal industry and the radical left. 36

The bi-centennial extravaganza ultimately went ahead. Actors dressed as Captain Cook and his crew splashed ashore and declared the new continent the possession of the

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31 Blainey, cited in Macintyre, op.cit, p.105
32 S. Macintyre, ibid ,p. 108
33 J. Carroll cited in Macintyre, ibid, p.108
34 J. Carroll and A. McAdam cited in Macintyre  ibid. p.109
35 G. Blainey cited in Macintyre, ibid. p.110
36 K. Baker, op.cit, 1985
British crown. Aboriginals and their supporters protested. The majority of the large crowds around Sydney Harbour seemed to enjoy the spectacle and the fireworks.

But for the history warriors and culture warriors on both sides it was a watershed moment, particularly for the conservatives who were now organised, buoyed by the neo-conservative surge in the US, and intellectually prepared to take the fight to the progressives, particularly on the Aboriginal history issue.

Mabo, and the rise of culture war conservatism
The next major battlefront was the Mabo controversy of 1992. This concerned the struggle of Eddie Mabo and his kinfolk to regain native title over their islands in the Torres Strait. It took a decade and it became a cause celebre for progressives. It eventually came down to a decision by the High Court of Australia that the notion of *terra nullius* (empty land) as applied to Australia at the moment of British occupation was a ‘discriminatory denigration’ of its Aboriginal inhabitants, which did not extinguish native title. Indeed, it was now described significantly as based upon ‘false historical memory’.  

The shock waves of this decision swept through the conservative communities and it created alarm within the mining and pastoral industries, which now railed at ‘political judges’ and warned of a potential Aboriginal takeover of all Australian homes. Their great fear, of course, was the threat to exclusive rights over mining and farming leases, and this prompted a major infusion of capital and energy into the conservative campaign in the History/Culture wars. This fear was only enhanced by the Wik judgement of 1996.

Blainey now became a major voice in the conflict, in favour of the mining industry and critical of the support for Aboriginal rights. In typical History Wars fashion he accepted the ‘lamentable’ behaviour of some whites but he was scathing of the ‘intelligensia’ who refused to accept the historical fact that destruction of such a

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37 N. Abjorensen, ‘The History Wars’ in J. George and K. Huynh eds, op.cit. 2009 p.150
38 In 1996, The High Court decided in the Wik case that native title and pastoral leases could co-exist over the same territory and that Aboriginals could use this land for cultural ceremonies and hunting. Crucially, however, the judges decided (4-3) that should there be conflict over the use of the land, native title would have precedence.
primitive culture was inevitable. It was regrettable, he admitted, but it should not be allowed to undermine the wealth creating projects of an industry crucial to the modern Australian economy.

It was against this festering background that Keating was rejected by the Australian electorate in 1996 and replaced by Howard, a devotee of the special neo-conservative hybridism - of free market capitalism and social conservatism. Howard was no more successful than anyone else in explaining quite how rampant capitalist self-interest and traditional community values work in practice but, as in the US, it didn’t seem to matter. More important, he insisted, was the fact that ordinary Australian’s needed no longer be ‘anxious’ about progressive politics.

Howard’s assault on the progressives
Once in power Howard increased the pressure on the liberal-progressives, concerned to win both the History War and the Culture War for the ‘real’ Australia. One strategy in this enterprise saw him cleverly manipulating the anxiety of working class Australians shaken by Keating’s urging about cultural and economic change.

In particular, it saw him appropriating for mainstream Australia the bigotry of the nationalist right, now centred around a Sarah Palin figure from Queensland - Pauline Hanson - who flickered briefly on the political scene as a spokesperson for ordinary Australians. Part of Hanson’s rage against the ‘intelligensia’ particularly impressed Howard - that which condemned liberal history as ‘Australian anti-history, a historical revisionism of feminism, Asianism, muticulturalism and Aboriginalism’. 39

Howard maintained this rage when the report on the ‘stolen generation’, Bringing Them Home was published in 1997. It spoke of a sixty-year long Government policy (1910-1970) to remove mixed race children from their parents in order to assimilate them into white society, while the remaining ‘tribal natives’ died out. This was a kind of genocide, it was argued, and there were widespread calls from Aboriginal groups and liberal supporters for an apology, for this and for other crimes committed against indigenous Australians since 1788.

39 Hanson, cited in Macintyre, op.cit. p. 140
The Howard government and its supporters responded very differently. Howard, quite reasonably, suggested that the removals were often carried out with the best intentions, by people concerned for the welfare of the children. Others did the polemical dirty work. The culture warriors of the right in the journal Quadrant and the Murdoch press took an unremitting hard line on the issue, and some conservative commentators refused to accept the ‘stolen generation’ figures. It might be ‘as low as several thousand’, one protested, hardly an issue for apology or compensation. Another ridiculed the call for an apology from ‘the tragically, emotionally disturbed individuals ...bent on attracting a new welfare market.’

The Howard Government submitted its own report on the removal of the children to a Senate inquiry in 2000 which Howard suggested was ‘a factual analysis of the issues’ rather than exaggerated leftism. It found inadvertent suffering on the part of some parents and children, but no official or conscious attempt to assimilate by force.

The ‘Fabrication of Australian History’ conflict
It was clear then by the turn of the century there was to be no quarter given on the struggle for memory, truth and identity in the Culture/History Wars in Australia. Increasingly, however, conservatives were intent on illustrating that liberal historians were actually lying about the past - fabricating facts for political gain.

It was now that Windschuttle intervened in the conflict in a manner that saw him become a heroic figure for conservatives and an inspiration for John Howard. His book The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Vol. 1(2002) gained instant notoriety because it directly accused liberal historians of lying about frontier massacres and indeed about the subsequent destruction of Aboriginal society and culture.

His particular target was Henry Reynolds, a high profile liberal historian whose evidence in the Mabo case had been crucial to that judgment. In the 1970s and 1980s Reynolds carried out painstaking research on the early frontier wars between Aboriginals and Europeans. There was reasonably precise evidence of European deaths

\[40\] M. Duffy and P. Ackerman, cited in Macintyre, op.cit. p157
(2000-2500) but far less on Aboriginal dead. Reynolds pieced together what evidence there was, calibrated the asymmetries of weapons and resources, and concluded that around 20,000 had died. 41

Some conservatives reluctantly accepted the possibility of this, including Blainey,42 but now Windschuttle refuted it and accused Reynolds of creating a ‘massacre myth’ - not because he was a postmodernist per se but because he was a progressivist ideologue. In his sights too were historians of similar propensity, ‘university teachers with overt left-wing commitments’. 43

Windschuttle’s technique is one of minute forensic examination of detail, and in his critiques of Reynolds’s work and others in The Fabrication of Aboriginal History he scrutinised every footnote, every document, every statement indicating violent action against Aboriginals - to reduce the numbers killed, to illustrate bias or exaggeration against the colonial authorities. Maintaining his positivist mind-set he then discounted evidence of Aboriginal deaths if there was no documented fact, no independent source of evidence.

He did find some minor errors of detail and made much of them. And on the basis of his research he presented a counter-history proposing that in Tasmania, where the argument for genocide was strongest, no more than 118 deaths could be historically accounted for, and that the cultural primitiveness of the tribes and their violence against their women were more compelling reasons for the virtual extinction of the Tasmanian Aboriginals. 44

Thus, the whole Aboriginal massacre theme (and by implication the wholesale killing of Aborigines) was an ideological campaign waged by the alienated left seeking to undermine mainstream Australian and western culture for political purposes. The conservative press was ecstatic - his supporters proclaiming that Windschuttle ‘uncovers the truth’ at last. Blainey described the book as ‘one of the most important

42 Macintyre, op.cit. p.161
43 ibid, p. 168
44 ibid, p. 166
and devastating written on Australian history in recent years’. 45

Other disagreed. The liberal historian Stuart Macintyre called it ‘a shocking book’, shocking in its allegations of fabrication and also in the refusal of the interpretive framework that earlier historians had employed.’ 46 Liberals, in general, fought back. Windschuttle’s work was lambasted for its rigidly narrow methodology and its misrepresentation of liberal history in general. His one dimensional empiricism came under attack for its strict reliance on official sources, which Australian historians in general acknowledged were notoriously untrustworthy as the basis of ‘what really happened’ on the frontier. 47

Another kind of critique came from the leftist economist John Quiggin - no friend of ‘postmodern’ historians. Quiggin proposed that while the work scores some modest hits against his opponents it did immense damage to Windschuttle’s reputation, because for all its articulation of objectivism it is little more than a faintly disguised polemic in favour of some of his post-Marxist obsessions ‘economic rationalism, political Christianity and the cultural superiority of the West’. Ultimately, suggests Quiggin, it’s ‘a polemical defence of an extreme position, ignoring or downplaying evidence that contradicts his case for the defence of British settlers in Australia.’ Quiggin concluded, ‘The word ‘racist’ has become taboo in Australian intellectual debates but I find difficult to think of an alternative characterisation’ of Windschuttle’s work’. 48

In many ways however none of this mattered any longer. Windschuttle had wrenched the History Wars debate well beyond the rights and wrongs of historical scholarship. It was now openly about a Culture War and the momentum was very much with the conservative side.

46 Macintyre, op.cit. p.167
History War as open Culture War

The columnists in the Murdoch press increasingly became a cheer squad for Culture War conservatives. Right wing think tanks and journals now accelerated their attacks on the ‘liberal ‘commentariat’ in the universities. Some, such as Andrew Bolt, poured scorn on the whole notion of a ‘stolen generation’, dismissing the evidence that children were forcibly removed and pointing to Aboriginal activists and liberal lawyers seeking unjustified compensation as the basis of the claims. 49 This, of course, flew in the face of the hundreds of submissions to the Bringing Them Home report from Aboriginal people actually removed as children, a report which was now ridiculed by conservatives.

Howard was careful not to explicitly engage in this Culture War surge but occasionally his caution gave way to open endorsement of the conservative position. A function for his favourite journal, Quadrant in 2006 was one such occasion, which saw Howard proposing that Quadrant* is Australia’s home to all that is worth preserving in the Western cultural tradition’ In particular, that during the Cold War it stood against the ‘philo-communism’ of historians such as Manning Clark (Keating’s inspiration) and the ‘pro-communist’ members of the ‘New Left counter culture’, many of whom now continued their ‘soft left’ dominance of the humanities in Australia’s universities. And ultimately, he admitted:

Of all the causes close to my heart none is more important than the role it has played as counterforce to the ‘black armband’ view of Australian history. Until recent times it has become almost de rigueur in intellectual circles to regard Australian history as little more than a litany of sexism, racism and class warfare...Quadrant has been an outpost of lively non-conformity in its willingness to defend both Geoffrey Blainey and Keith Windschuttle against the possess of political correctness. 50

Howard was keen by 2006 to widen his attack, proposing that the teaching of history in Australian schools was also being subverted by leftists and postmodernists. Too often, opined the prime minister, ‘history along with the other subjects in the humanities has succumbed to a postmodern culture of relativism where any objective record of

50 Howard, cited in ibid.p.157
achievement is questioned or repudiated.' Howard was never able to explain just what this postmodernism looked like, but it was clear he didn’t like it, and neither did the conservative cheer squads who demanded a new school curriculum purged of its influences.

Windschuttle, in his own inimitable fashion, produced an all-in-one condemnation of the liberal menace inside and outside the universities that just about sums up the conservative attitude during the History War/Culture War struggle in Australia. Taking aim, he lambasted:

The leading opinion makers in the media, the universities and the churches [who] regard Western superiority as, at best, something to be ashamed of, and at worst, something to be opposed...according to this ideology, instead of attempting to globalize its values the West should stay in its own cultural backyard. Values like universal rights, individualism and liberalism are regarded as ethnocentric products of Western history...this anti-Western, postmodern, multicultural, post-colonial intellectual edifice constitutes the true [progressivist] ideology. \(^{52}\)

Who won the History Wars?

In early 2009 it’s probably worth pondering the question of who won the History Wars? Or, more accurately, who is now winning the struggle that continues inside and outside of Australia’s universities? Both sides have a case.

The conservatives certainly won the majority of battles during the Howard era (1996-2007) both in the broader community - where a strategy of populist nationalism and ‘wedging’ proved overwhelmingly popular - and inside the universities where life became significantly more unstable and uncomfortable for those targeted by the Howard Government and its supporters. I’ll touch on this issue again in a moment. Suffice to say that, arguably, momentum remains with the conservative side.

On the other hand Howard was decisively beaten in 2007 and the ALP returned to

\(^{51}\) Howard, ibid

power under a popular PM in Kevin Rudd. More pertinently, Rudd finally made the apology to Aboriginal peoples in 2008 in a moving and much praised ceremony. From the liberal perspective this was a vindication of the History Wars struggle - a victory for a progressivist account of Australia's past and present, and hopefully its future.

But Rudd makes much of his social conservatism, his religiosity and his commitment to neo-liberalism (albeit a wavering commitment after the economic melt down of 2008) and is well aware of the traditionalist perspectives of his support base on a range of sensitive cultural issues, particularly the issue of (Anglo-Celtic) identity. Liberal-progressives thus remain positive but cautious about the Rudd government in the long term.

As for Australia's indigenous peoples - there have been many false dawns. Nevertheless, there is a sense that some important battles might now be won - over land rights and health issues in particular. But those living isolated semi-traditional lives continue to exist in conditions as bad as anything in the worst favellas and shanty towns of the poor world. Meanwhile, those in urban settings suffer rates of alcohol abuse, poverty and incarceration far greater than their white counterparts - and overall their access to health and education facilities is disgraceful in 21st century Australia. People of good will - and there are many across the History/Culture War spectrum - hope for a better future for the first Australians.

Universities in the age of 'backlash'
Finally, what does all this tell us about the modern university? Or, more precisely, about the crises in universities around the Western world, in the age of 'backlash' - the neo-liberal backlash to Keynesianism, and the conservative and neo-conservative backlash to post-1960s liberal progressivism. I can only touch briefly on this complex issue here, for the most part using the History War debate above as the focus of discussion.

Beyond the contempt and vitriol heaped on Australia's historians during the Howard era, Howard acted to legislatively punish progressivist sectors in the universities and in the media. Consequently, there were significant cuts in funding for universities and other liberal institutions (e. g. the ABC) and between 1996-2003 Australia was the only
OECD country to reduce public spending on tertiary education as a proportion of GDP. Indeed, while other OECD countries increased spending by an average of 48% - Australia's declined by 7%. Moreover, the Howard government saw fit to intervene in the peer-review processes of the ARC (Australian Research Council), vetoing those research applications it didn’t consider worthy of funding.\textsuperscript{53}

It's worth noting that the attacks on university funding began under the previous ALP governments of Hawke and Keating, committed as they also were to neo-liberal forms of economic rationalism. But the Howard government more explicitly ‘attempted to tilt the playing field of public debate by exerting financial and ideological pressure on institutions perceived as critical of government policy or subversive of conservative understandings of Australian history.’\textsuperscript{54}

To a large extent it was successful in this enterprise. The accelerated creation of a corporate university sector designed to compete in market terms for funding and student-clients has impacted significantly upon the morale and structural make-up of Australian universities. In particular, the imposition of neo-liberal managerialism has had particular implications for the autonomy of the modern Academy and of (many) academics.

Vice-Chancellors (as CEO's) have been forced to find alternative sources of funding - e.g. from international students and Government or private sector grant schemes etc. This has seen an expansion of university bureaucracies employed to search out these alternative sources and manage the research efforts of staff - now also expected to become individualised entrepreneurs in the new corporate marketplace. A recent commentary suggested that 50% of the budget of most Australian universities is now taken up by its bureaucracy - a budget which is therefore even more squeezed when it comes to ‘academics at the bottom of the food chain’.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid
\textsuperscript{55} S. Buckle, ‘Starved for Some Loving Attention’, The Australian, 9/4/08
With this advent of corporate bureaucratisation has come a surveillance regime familiar to most Academics in 2009 - a regime invariably imposed by people with little experience of the university sector but employed because of their generic (neo-liberal) managerial experience. Hence, the micro-managed practices of audit, inspection and monitoring and the valorisation of the corporate business model as the one-size-fits all solution to what ails the university and its ‘inefficient’ academic workforce.

The humanities have been particularly hard hit by these ‘reforms’. In Australia, the Howard Government (and its successor) articulates its preference for the hard sciences, where ‘productivity’ is more easily evaluated and where there is sometimes an obvious pay off (a discovery!) for public money spent. Universities thus channel funds away from the humanities to ‘applied’ fields in the pursuit of higher placement in increasingly competitive University league tables.

At the same time, however, students are shovelled into the humanities in ever greater numbers while staff numbers remain, at best, static. In an Australian context one observer of this phenomenon has suggested that this leads to a situation in which ‘the average humanities lecturer struggles to find time to read what American academics have time to write’. 56

This is undoubtedly a misperception concerning the position of most American scholars. But it does indicate something of the problems and frustrations of those in Australia teaching in the humanities in the 21st century. For those engaged in critical studies - on History Wars topics for example - the problems are increased as competition increases for grant monies to carry out research under spiraling teaching loads.

The problem here is that the grant system is largely hostile to such research - biased increasingly instead toward those projects with direct economic benefit or which address immediate issues of national security. The problems are enhanced when, as Buckle has proposed, more and more ‘jobs are awarded on grant getting ability not on

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56 S. Buckle, ibid.
intellectual merits'. This might be a little harsh - there are good scholars around who also have entrepreneurial skills. But it does point to a perception alive in the Australian humanities community - that intellectual adventure and innovation will not be rewarded - that taking an orthodox and conservative position is a good career move and that the adventurous, questioning spirit of the period since the 1980s must be curtailed for the sake of survival in hard times.

If this is the case, of course, the conservatives have won the History/Culture Wars, as scholars and students effectively self-censor their thinking and writing in line with corporate expectations and reward. And if it is the case it begs a whole range of more philosophically oriented questions about what the university stands for in the contemporary era - questions posed in a variety of ways during the History/Culture Wars conflicts.

In this regard a good deal of confusion has reigned, particularly on the conservative side where a neo-conservative hybridism has not helped matters. Consequently, figures such as Windschuttle and John Howard, while sometimes speaking like flinty-eyed Hayekians in championing the neo-liberal university (where students are clients and where subject matter is dumbed down to the lowest common denominator); speak also like Oakeshottians or even Straussians in their appeals for some kind of golden age of education, in which the best and brightest engage the Classics in serene analytical contemplation with the God professor.

There is something undoubtedly attractive about this traditional model of university life based on intellectual rigour and unhurried reflection and it was experienced by a privileged few down the centuries, some of whom have contributed greatly to the cultural richness of the modern world. The problem, of course, is that this was never a model designed for anything other than the very privileged few and it was never the apolitical educational scenario it is invariably represented as by conservatives.

On the contrary, as Strauss in his esoteric mode knew well enough, it served a crucial ideological purpose, in recreating ruling classes and dominant elites steeped in the

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57 ibid
special knowledges and social codes of the Western canon and committed to the continuation of its hierarchies and its traditional narratives of memory, truth and identity. And this kind of education system was crucial when patriotism and sacrifice was required - in times of war and when national power and identity was challenged. Indeed, much of the Culture War in the US (and Australia) since the 1960s has centred on the fear of conservatives that these characteristics are being educated out of generations of young Americans. Hence, much of the hysteria associated with attacks on liberal-left in US universities in the period since 9/11 in particular. Hence, much of the anti-postmodern hysteria of the Australian History Wars.

But Liberal-progressives also have some difficult questions to confront. The point is that just as the conservative model is riven with ideological intent and cultural purpose so too is the liberal model - derived from Enlightenment notions of rational-scientific contemplation and knowledge and committed to a progressivist politics, so often represented as ‘emancipatory’ and ‘modernising’, but so often contemptuous of and damaging to other ways of life, different modes of cultural memory, identity and truth.

In the Australian Culture War context the emancipatory enthusiasm of Keating and his supporters was exemplary in this regard in its contempt for mainstream working class culture. The point, as David McKnight has put it, is that the surge towards neo-liberalism and multiculturalism effectively left traditionalist Anglo-Celtic Australians with little alternative but to ‘simply smile, step aside and be passive’ as their world view was deemed no longer tolerant enough or nuanced enough for the new world order.58

On the other hand liberal progressivism has achieved much in opening up the modern world to Western ideas, social formations and freedoms and it has helped open Australian society to its silenced past. In the future it might prove crucial in providing the cultural space for the decedents of the first Australians to live and think in ways they consider appropriate to their memories and identities and truths. There is, of course, reason for scepticism here too. Four centuries of indigenous dispossession,

58 D. McKnight, op. cit., p. 211
ruinous 'development' and cultural maltreatment - too much of it at the hands of Western 'liberal progressives' - is reason enough.

In short, if the Australian History/Culture wars have reminded us of anything it is this: that conservative/neo-conservative perspectives and their liberal progressivist counterparts are heavily imbued with single narrative thinking and, in practice, have too often been engaged in political, ideological and cultural closure down the years - be it in regard to indigenous Others standing in the way of Western dominance and/or progress; or be it in regard to those of one's own culture rendered inconsequential on the basis of particular educational or class criteria.

This is important to remember when one contemplates what is at stake in the present crisis of the university because, as Bhikhu Parekh proposes, a university - at its very minimum - must reject (intellectual, political, cultural) closure. Indeed it must be 'open to all currents of though irrespective of national and cultural origins', guided by 'the realisation that dialogue with the other is the only way to rise above local prejudice.'

It must - at its minimum - remain a centre of resistance to ideological dogma and one dimensional thinking and must always be capable of 'questioning the questions' one asks of the world. It is, therefore 'an inherently critical' space which should never be reduced to single narrative nationalism - either conservative or radical - or to one size fits all corporatism. 59 Or indeed to singular notions of truth, identity and memory.

This is not to idealise the University, it should reflect important aspects of the community in which it is sited - it is perhaps to indicate the minimum characteristics all such communities might aspire to. The History Wars in Australia have indicated that important sectors of the Australian community still have some way to go in this regard.