# The cultural conditions of Cold War Australia: Conventions of and challenges to the 'Australian Way of Life' from 1947 to 1972

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## Abstract

This essay explores the role of the Cold War in Australian cultural life from 1947 to 1972 and the extent to which the encroachment of polarising politics on the domestic sphere transformed ideals of the supposed 'Australian Way of Life'. Through analysis of the social expressions of 'Old' and 'New' Australians during the Cold War period, I chart the trends and transitions in Australian cultural identity and the shift from traditional fixations on national isolation and ethnic homogeneity toward a more diverse population and global outlook. While historiographical analysis has traditionally categorised the Cold War era by decades of dissimilarity—with the 1950s considered a time of anxious conformity and the 1960s associated with progressive social change—considerable cultural debate concerning the character and stability of the 'Australian Way of Life' endured throughout the period. Questioning the widespread assumption of Australian cultural life as a derivative backwater, this essay argues that demographic, social, and intellectual transitions generated by the Cold War forced the growing populace, and both sides of the ideological spectrum, to confront their place in the world and imagine the nation anew into the second half of the twentieth century.

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The cultural conditions of the Cold War exacerbated pre-existing anxieties concerning the character and stability of the supposed 'Australian Way of Life', as experiences of the 'everyday' for citizens 'Old' and 'New' were expanded, challenged, and debated across ideological lines. Notwithstanding the ebb and flow of the global Cold War conflict, the period from 1947 to 1972 was marked by the mass arrival of migrants to Australia's shores and 23 years of conservative government following Robert Menzies's second appointment as prime minister in 1949. Categorisations of dissimilarities in these decades nevertheless abound: the 1950s, historians are quick to maintain, was not the decade of suburban tranquillity often depicted in popular culture, but rather a time of paranoid conformity and deep-seated division.[1] Conversely, the 1960s have taken on a mythical status associated with progressive social change administered at the hands of baby-boom youth.[2] These neat assessments oversimplify the multilayered cultural concerns aired by politicians, social commentators, and Australians both 'Old' and 'New' during the period, as society was transformed by the encroachment of Cold War politics into the domestic sphere.

This essay surveys shifts in political leadership, migration, and Australian cultural outlook to argue that, together with demographic transformation and economic stability, Cold War cultural conditions manifested in expressions of national identity that lauded a unique 'Australian Way of Life', however ill-defined. Broadly conceived, this 'Way of Life' was linked to what Richard White sees as the

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[1] Stephen Alomes, Mark Dober and Donna Hellier, 'The social context of postwar conservatism', in *Australia's first Cold War*, ed. Ann Curthoys and John Merritt, vol. 1, *Society, communism and culture* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984); Nicholas Brown, *Governing prosperity: Social change and social analysis in Australia in the 1950s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[2] Robin Gerster and Jan Bassett, *Seizures of youth: The sixties and Australia* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1991); Shirleene Robinson, Julie Ustinoff, and Tanja Luckins, *The 1960s in Australia: People, power and politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

perceived Australian cultural 'type' that lauded the nation as a paradise for the working man.[3] Conceptions of the 'Australian Way of Life' had roots in the colonial era and entailed isolationist anxieties generated by Australia's location in the Asia-Pacific region, racial discourses maintaining the supremacy of white Anglo-Saxons, and an avowedly masculinist ideal of 'mateship' and 'a fair go', evident through cultural archetypes such as the bushman, larrikin, and Anzac. This 'Way of Life' was believed to be under threat by the postwar Displaced Persons migration scheme and rising influence of the Communist Party of Australia, with prime minister Menzies harnessing these fears in his articulation of middle-class Australia as the 'Forgotten People'. Economic stability bolstered claims of Australia as a classless society, with representatives of both the cultural Left and cultural Right inspired to stake their claims for an independent Australian identity. While the impulse of critics evinced throughout this essay shows that to view Australia's cultural identity as a derivative backwater is perhaps endemic to the history of national self-identification, a new progressivism emerged to reimagine Australia away from assumptions of apathy and indifference. This shift was embodied in the termination of the White Australia Policy and the country's increasingly global outlook. Drawing upon a range of primary sources, this essay argues that the Cold War forced the growing populace and both sides of the ideological spectrum to confront their place in the globalising world and imagine the nation anew into the second half of the twentieth century.[4]

The advent of the Cold War in 1947 coincided with the Displaced Persons immigration scheme, which aided European postwar migration and accelerated cultural anxieties over the expansion and diversification of Australia's population. While Australia was yet to recover from the crisis mindset of the Second World War, migration was deemed essential under the postwar mantra of 'populate or perish', and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Europeans from war-ravaged nations heightened vulnerabilities regarding the stability of the 'Australian Way of Life'.[5] This 'Way of Life' was recognised at the time and subsequently to be rather nebulous, with a *Sydney Morning Herald* article from 1950 admitting 'five men stopped at random in Sydney streets said they didn't know what constituted the Australian Way of Life'.[6] Richard White nevertheless argues that the term's usage accelerated in the postwar era, as the Cold War required a 'presupposed homogeneity and a status quo which had to be defended'.[7] One commentator from the University of Sydney, Professor FA Bland, saw isolation as a keen tenet of Australian identity, stating: 'From our isolation we tend to develop irresponsibility and indifference to matters beyond our own shores. That makes us very harsh to foreigners and intolerant to their habits'.[8] Isolationist anxieties grew alongside a new cultural fixation on the strength and expansion of the Soviet Union, with the Cold War reinforcing fears of foreign influence.

The tendency to conflate Displaced Persons with nearly escaping a communist fate—irrespective of country of origin—was rife. As one newspaper wrote in 1950, 'where Communism rules, the terror, the fear and the propaganda make the reason for life the State itself. This is the territory whence the D.P.'s [Displaced Persons] are coming'.[9] Fears of the domestic threat of communism were bolstered by the ideological conviction of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). While Australian Leftists were by no means monolithic in their beliefs, the CPA was dogmatic in toeing the Soviet line until 1968, and did little to allay anxieties in 1949 by claiming workers would welcome the arrival of the Red Army onto Australian shores.[10] Menzies was elected prime minister on the promise to outlaw the CPA and evoked—both during his campaign and subsequently—age-old fears concerning invasion, as

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[3] Richard White, 'The Australian way of life', *Historical Studies* 18, no. 73 (1979): 528–45.

[4] The primary sources that inform this essay include a selection of newspaper articles, photographs and public commentary concerning Australian cultural life from 1947 to 1972. These sources underpin my analysis and complement the insights of contemporary historical scholarship.

[5] 'Populate or perish', *The Argus* (Melbourne), 4 August 1945, 1.

[6] 'People give their opinions on the Australian way of life', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 30 January 1950, 2.

[7] White, 'The Australian way of life', 550.

[8] 'People give their opinions on the Australian way of life', 2.

[9] 'D.P.' was a popular abbreviation for those migrants in the Displaced Persons Scheme. A Hamory, 'Behind the Iron Curtain', *Border Watch* (Mount Gambier), 10 August 1950, 9.

[10] '"Welcome" for Red troops', *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 5 March 1949.

communists were described as 'an alien and destructive pest' capable of swarming en masse to infiltrate the nation's borders (see Figure 1).[11] While the 1951 referendum to ban the Communist Party was narrowly defeated, Australians were conditioned to remain anxious of the threat of communism and the potential challenge to national life provoked by the arrival of foreign migrants.



Figure 1: 'Yes' Referendum campaign poster (1951).

Source: Ephemera collection PR8680/1951, State Library of Western Australia.

Menzies maintained power by monopolising this fear, continuously relaying the threat of a Third World War and moulding Australian identity away from class identification toward a sense of moral individualism. Stephen Alomes identifies the consolidation of postwar conservatism in the 'language of crisis, threat and invasion [that] had dominated Australian politics during the war years … replay[ing] continually over the next ten years'.[12] Menzies' warnings in 1950 that Australia must 'gear for war' and prepare for a 'tremendous threat', and could not 'dismiss the trouble in Korea', were bolstered by Australia's entry into the Korean War, sustaining his victory in the 1951 election.[13] Judith Brett explains the electoral appeal of Menzies over the next 16 years was in his ability to conjure the 'Australian Way of Life' in the vision of middle-class, non-unionised individuals characterised as the 'Forgotten People'.[14] In his 1954 federal election speech, Menzies articulated his belief that the archetypal Australian should be the antithesis to socialist thought, arguing:

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[11] 'Communism in Australia: "A destructive pest"', *Cairns Post*, 11 November 1949, 5.

[12] Alomes, Dober and Hellier, *The social context of postwar conservatism*, 8.

[13] '"Gear for War"—Menzies', *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 10 August 1950, 3.

[14] Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' forgotten people*, new ed. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007).

We believe in the individual, in his freedom, in his ambition, in his dignity. If he becomes submerged in the mass … we have tyranny … the dull, unproductive, Socialist philosophy, is merely the definition of stagnation and death.[15]

Nicholas Brown maintains that this 'common-sense individualism' was attractive to many Australians whose experiences in the Great Depression and Second World War made them 'uncomfortable with the change they associated with post-war affluence [and] the moral character of people'.[16] Indeed, Cold War cultural concern 'resembled a religious fervour in its intensity'.[17] This provoked some representatives of traditional pillars of society—including figures from the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, rabbis, the Australian President of the World Council of Churches, and several Supreme Court Justices—to pen Australians an open letter in 1952 warning that the country's 'moral and intellectual apathy' lacked the 'strength and moral unity sufficient to save our country and our liberties' from unnamed threats.[18] This sentiment supported Menzies' belief that Australians need to cultivate a liberal individualism in order to protect the sanctity of the nation's perceived 'Way of Life'.

By urging Australians to identify themselves in the personal rather than political sphere, Menzies created cultural conditions that venerated domestic life as 'Old' and 'New' Australians were encouraged to embrace the material prosperity of the economic long boom. Despite the social strife generated by Cold War ideological divisions, the 'everyday' for many Australians was more prosperous in the 1950s and 1960s than ever before.[19] While migrants known as the 'New Australians' were subject to racism and the government's demanding labour schemes, material conditions flourished as home ownership reached a rate of 70 per cent—an all-time high—and many enjoyed the proliferation of new technology.[20] Peter Conrad remembers his childhood in 1950s Tasmania as one of self-conscious stability:

We huddled in a mock-up of suburban England, remorselessly bright and bland. Spatial paranoia made us thankful for our isolation from the world. Back then, Europe was a scrabble board of unlucky countries—the sources of wars and food that tasted too spicy.[21]

Where migrants were shown to defy these stereotypes and become assimilated into the suburban, domestically oriented 'Australian Way of Life', they were celebrated. Hundreds of photographs of migrant success stories are located in the National Archives of Australia. One image shows a Dutch mother and daughter smiling in their suburban Sydney home and posing in front of their new 'modern kitchen'. The caption argues that the pair 'love the Australian way of life' (see Figure 2).[22] A declaration that 'the Australian way of life is the best' was similarly echoed by a cheerful Italian family photographed picking fruit in Western Australia (see Figure 3).[23] Even migrants such as Ludwig Schaumuller (see Figure 4), pictured smiling over a stovetop, were now said to be 'contented connoisseur[s] of Australian foods' with the British 'steak and eggs replac[ing] Vienna Schnitzel as [the Chef's] favourite dish'.[24] Attention to these images demonstrates that migrants who were seen to reject former national loyalties for the materially prosperous 'Australian Way of Life' were clear and

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[15] Robert Menzies, 'Australian federal election speech', delivered 5 May 1954, transcript at: Museum of Australian Democracy, electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1954-robert-menzies.

[16] Brown, *Governing prosperity*, 11.

[17] George Williams, 'The suppression of communism by force of law: Australia in the early 1950s', *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 42, no. 2 (1996): 225.

[18] 'A call to the people of Australia', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 11 November 1952, 2.

[19] Mark Peel and Christina Twomey, *A history of Australia*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave, 2018).

[20] Peel and Twomey, *A history of Australia*, 222.

[21] Peter Conrad, 'Down under', 28 November 2004, in *Boyer lectures: Tales of two hemispheres*, produced by Andrew Forrest, transcript www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/boyerlectures/lecture-3-down-under/3433490.

[22] 'Immigration—Migrants in their homes—Dutch migrants have a modern kitchen …', photograph, 1960, Migrants in their homes series, Immigration photographic archive, A12111 1/1960/21/3, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

[23] 'Immigration—Migrants in employment—Commercial/clerical—Former Bergamo man, Giovani Imberti …', photograph, 1967, Migrants in employment series, Immigration photographic archive, A12111 1/1967/16/82, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

[24] 'Immigration—Migrants in employment in Australia—Former Austrian chef Ludwig Schaumuller …', photograph, 1959, Migrants in employment series, Immigration photographic archive, A12111 1/1959/16/88, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

powerful visual signifiers that upheld Menzies's ideal of Australian individualism during the Cold War years.



Figure 2: Photograph of Dutch mother and daughter from the Migrants in their homes series (1960).

Source: 'Immigration—Migrants in their homes—Dutch migrants have a modern kitchen …', photograph, 1960, Migrants in their homes series, Immigration photographic archive, A12111 1/1960/21/3, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
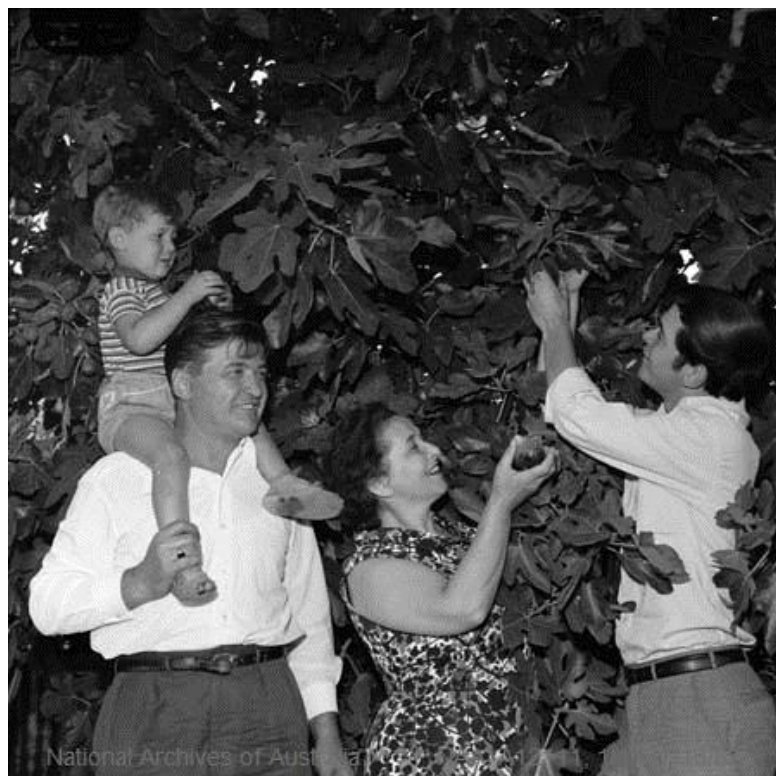


Figure 3: An Italian family shown in the Migrants in their homes series (1967).

Source: 'Immigration—Migrants in employment—Commercial/clerical—Former Bergamo man, Giovani Imberti …', photograph, 1967, Migrants in employment series, Immigration photographic archive, A12111 1/1967/16/82, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

Figure 4: A Viennese Chef shown in the Migrants in their homes series (1954).

Source: 'Immigration—Migrants in employment in Australia—Former Austrian chef Ludwig Schaumuller …', photograph, 1959, Migrants in employment series, Immigration photographic archive, A12111 1/1959/16/88, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.

While 'New Australians' were encouraged to see such representations as the nation's cultural identity and view Australia as a 'classless' society, for members of the Australian Left, the postwar world inspired many to look collectively toward the future, ushering in a new sense of cultural nationalism. Despite surviving the 1951 referendum, attempts to ban the Communist Party are described by Frank Cain and Frank Farrell as a deeply traumatic period that split the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and sidelined the political Left for decades.[25] Fears of communist infiltration in the cultural sphere nevertheless ensued, manifesting in attacks on intellectuals and the Commonwealth Literary Fund (CLF) by bipartisan politicians.[26] McKernan points out that accusations of communist sympathy directed toward works of socialist realism—such as those sponsored by the CLF—were more complex than political rhetoric of the time conveyed. Many communist writers 'could see socialist realism was but another form of the Australian tradition', and wrote works that valorised the Australian worker, often a bushman or labourer, rather than any Soviet motif.[27] Indeed, historian Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend*, published in 1958, was an archetypal work of Leftist cultural nationalism.[28] He admitted in an interview years later that he and fellow members of the CPA were 'just as keen on Australian nationalism and literature as they were on any social change'.[29] Leftist cultural outputs therefore supported some conventional attributes of the 'Australian Way of Life', as they built on the labours of the working man.

Australian conservatism had traditionally centred on expressions of Anglocentrism and found common ground with the nationalist Left in critiquing 'Americanisation' as degrading to Australia's 'Way of Life'. As British allegiance waned, new generations of conservatives were supported by American hegemony in attempts to contain communist influence among the Left. Described by the communist *Tribune* in 1953 as 'a menace to Australia', the influence of American popular culture was thought to

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[25] Frank Cain and Frank Farrell, 'Menzies' War on the Communist Party, 1949–1951', in Curthoys and Merritt, *Australia's first Cold War*.

[26] Susan McKernan, 'Literature in a straitjacket', in Curthoys and Merritt, in *Australia's first Cold War*.

[27] McKernan, 'Literature in a straitjacket', 142.

[28] Drew Cottle, 'A bowyang historian in the Cold War Antipodes: Russel Ward and the making of the Australian legend', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 10, no. 2 (2008): 171.

[29] Russel Ward, oral history interview by Neville Meaney, 1986, Neville Meaney collection, ID 756347, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

'undermine genuine Australian democratic culture and patriotism'.[30] Australia had a long history of censorship, and some of the strictest measures across democratic nations, and it was advocated across the political spectrum as a means to preserve what was considered the uniquely Australian 'Way of Life'.[31] Associations of American culture with crime and delinquency dominated the pages of the press and echoed conventional demands that Australian culture ought to remain based upon British mores.[32] These arguments took a more Antipodean spin in the pages of *Meanjin* in the 1950s, as editor Clement Christensen defended the regime of censorship by arguing, 'surely any country has a right to protect its own culture from being perverted and corrupted by debased forms of a foreign culture'.[33] While this defence was in favour of uniquely Australian cultural expressions, Richard White argues that 'in the confusion of uncertain loyalties in the Fifties … Americanisation could still elicit a common response' from those maintaining adherence to the British tradition.[34] British loyalties nevertheless diminished as new strategic alliances were drawn with the United States, and cultural initiatives including the Congress of Cultural Freedom—later found to be sponsored by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency—were established within Australia. Aimed at the 'defence of ordinary people against the encroachments of the creative and critical spirit of mankind',[35] the Congress nominally worked to counter the communist Left and promote a uniform notion of Australian culture to the public amid increasing polarisation.[36] The attempted containment of all cultural and social expressions deemed threatening to the status quo was further upheld by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, with masses of information on individuals and groups collected through invasive and often unfounded surveillance.[37] Australia's cultural outlook could therefore be identified in both British and American cultural genealogies, with the Right harnessing both lineages as a common ally in the Cold War's ideological conflict.

Ironically, one of the most prominent early recorded criticisms levelled by European migrants against the 'Australian Way of Life' was its lack of cultural maturity. A 1949 *Daily Telegraph* article on 'The migrant—His problem with adjustment' revealed the experiences of four recent migrants and their impressions of Australian life.[38] A Hungarian artist who had fled Budapest 'soon realised that Australians were not much interested in art at this time, especially his modern European-style art', and reflected that 'I miss many things European like cafes, music [and] theatre'.[39] An Englishman was more critical in his summation:

> Anyone with a foreign-speaking voice or who looks different is branded as a reffo, a dago, or a pommy: and this is the only country in the world where strangers are referred to in these ways … I think Australia is culturally a long way behind.[40]

Despite the expressions of cultural nationalism nurtured by the Left and emerging on the Right during the postwar years, Brown argues that 'in the fifties perhaps more than ever' there was an assumption that Australia was 'a derivative, impressionable society, aping the mere styles imported from elsewhere and unable to invest them with a content of our own'.[41] While critiques aired by migrants were dismissed in favour of an assimilation regime aimed more at publicity than wellbeing, as the Cold War

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[30] 'A menace to Australian culture', *Tribune South Australia* (Sydney), 21 October 1953, 1.

[31] Nicole Moore, *The censor's library* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2012).

[32] Richard White, '"Combating cultural aggression": Australian opposition to Americanisation', *Meanjin* 39, no. 3 (1980).

[33] Clement Christesen, 'The law grapples with Koka-Kola Kulture', *Meanjin* 13, no. 1 (1954): 2.

[34] White, '"Combating cultural aggression"': 280.

[35] Peter Snodgrass, 'Congress of Cultural Freedom is new body. but very necessary one', *The Land* (Sydney), 6 August 1954, 5.

[36] Frank Bongiorno, 'New Progressivism: Anthony Crossland and the coming of the Australian sixties', in Robinson, Ustinoff and Luckins, *The 1960s in Australia*.

[37] David McKnight, 'How to read your ASIO file', in *Dirty Secrets: Our ASIO files*, ed. Meredith Burgmann (Sydney: NewSouth, 2014).

[38] Ronald McKie, 'The migrant—His problems with adjustment', *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 29 January 1949, 14.

[39] McKie, 'The migrant', 4.

[40] Ibid, 4.

[41] Nicholas Brown, '"Sometimes the cream rises to the top, sometimes the scum": The exacting culture and politics of style in the 1950s', *Australian Historical Studies* 27, no. 109 (1997): 54.

progressed few could ignore their cultural contributions in every facet of Australian life.[42] There began a gradual shift in how the 'Australian Way of Life' should be understood, precipitated by those such as Judith Brett—later an influential political scientist—whose position as a university-educated youth during the period gave her the impression that 'Australian cultural life seemed frozen by smugness, fear and indifference, and dominated by the values and assumptions of a bygone age'.[43] Mass migration precipitated the decline of this cultural 'smugness, fear and indifference' as a diversification of Australia's demographic composition extended the parameters of who was believed to belong within the national 'Way of Life'.

The 1960s brought a 'New Progressivism' to Australia as the Cold War's global politics—and the influence of demographic change—encouraged society to engage with issues, including race, as they garnered international attention and tarnished Australia's image abroad. In assessing the rise of Aboriginal activism in the 1960s, Jennifer Clark argues that while steps to decolonise society did not sweep Australia as they did Africa following the Second World War, Australia could not ignore nor escape the 'winds of change'.[44] While Indigenous affairs and the White Australia Policy had long been criticised by the Soviet Union and other international representatives at the United Nations, it came to the attention of middle-class progressives at the turn of the decade as many Australians began to see racist policies as outdated and damaging to the country's international image.[45] The Melbourne-based Immigration Reform Group argued in their public pamphlet—which was circulated in newspapers across the country—that 'the notion of White Australia is poisoning our relations with Asia, indeed with the whole non-European world', maintaining that 'we believe [prejudice] is gradually diminishing'.[46] Reformist sentiment was echoed in the mainstream media, as the *Canberra Times* argued:

> Australians are still thin skinned in their acceptance of criticism by anyone who comes from overseas or who dares to return to Australia with overseas ideas … there is a little too much readiness to talk in terms of the Australian way of life when so much in the pattern of Australian behaviour remains unexplained and inexplicable.[47]

South Australia's Don Dunstan, one of a new generation of Labor politicians, had been agitating for reform in his own party since 1959, when he had failed to mobilise support to remove the 'White Australia' policy from the ALP platform.[48] The desire for a new progressive Australian identity more concerned with the view of its neighbours is seen by Tanja Luckins as indicative of a growing cosmopolitanism during the 1960s. This coincided with 'the material culture generated by migrants becoming integrated into the mainstream',[49] as activism against Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War—among other social issues—was precipitated by youth 'against the dominant culture of the Cold War'.[50] Indeed, the fragility of Australian culture continued to be a priority in need of address for social commentators as well as the general populace. As Donald Horne popularly vocalised in 1964, despite Australia's prosperity, there were 'frustrations and resentments of a triumphant mediocrity and the sheer dullness of life for many of its ordinary people'.[51] While struggles against racism on the domestic front and in migration and foreign policy would continue well into the 1970s, the contemporaneous success

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[42] Andrew Markus and Margaret Taft, 'Postwar immigration and assimilation: A reconceptualisation', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 2 (2015): 234–51.

[43] Brett, *Robert Menzies' forgotten people*, 19.

[44] Jennifer Clark, *Aborigines & activism: Race, aborigines & the coming of the sixties to Australia* (Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2008).

[45] 'Soviet attack on White Aust. Policy', *Daily Advertiser* (NSW), 21 April 1949; 'Australia strongly criticised', *The Canberra Times*, 12 November 1966, 1.

[46] The Immigration Reform Group, 'Control or colour bar? A proposal for change in Australia's immigration policy', pamphlet, 1960, vi, 2.

[47] 'New Australian influences in national thinking', *The Canberra Times*, 1 August 1960, 2.

[48] Gwenda Tavan, 'Immigration: Control or colour bar? The immigration reform movement, 1959–1966', *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 117 (2001): 181–200.

[49] Tanja Luckins, 'Cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitans: Australia in the world, the world in Australia', in Robinson, Ustinoff and Luckins, *The 1960s in Australia*, 62.

[50] Shirleene Robinson, '1960s counter-culture in Australia: The search for personal freedom', in Robinson, Ustinoff and Luckins, *The 1960s in Australia*, 123.

[51] Donald Horne, *The lucky country*, 6th ed. (Victoria: Penguin, 2009), 10.

of Horne's *The Lucky Country* and its scathing assessment of Australian orthodoxy was indicative of the 'New Progressivism' that Frank Bongiorno argues operated as 'an antidote to [the] national mediocrity' that was felt to have dominated Australian life.[52]

Many of these concerns regarding Australia's cultural image became mainstream in the 1960s, as political priorities recognised the need for Australia to foster a unique and independent identity away from the conservatism of the past. The retirement of Robert Menzies in 1966 was an important break in many of Australia's political and cultural stalemates. Harold Holt came to the post of prime minister with a more expansive view of the cultural value of migration. As the key architect of Australia's postwar migration scheme in his role as immigration minister under the Menzies Government, Holt argued at the 1952 Australian Citizenship Convention that the nation

> will take advantage of this great influx of new settlers to this country to build a more secure, a more prosperous and a happier Australia for the generations which are to follow.[53]

Holt's election was followed by a sweep of reforms that reinforced Australian cultural life as independent from that of Britain. Foremost among these policies was the Australia Council for the Arts, considered a major innovation and tool of 'cultural revival', ushered in just days prior to Holt's disappearance at Cheviot Beach in Victoria in December 1967.[54] Such cultural policy developments were thought not only to bolster domestic self-confidence, but were an important tool in furthering Australia's global image. As Raymond Sherry declared in the House of Representatives in 1970:

> The image of Australia abroad as a land of koala bears and gum trees no longer applies. The image we should try to establish abroad in the eyes of our neighbours and friends is of an Australia that is vibrant and artistically and culturally creative … If we can create this image abroad we will have gone a long way towards achieving true and full nationhood.[55]

This sentiment embodied Australia's movement towards a perceived cultural maturity and the increasing significance of an international outlook in Australian self-identification.

Cold War conflict and its cultural manifestations urged Australians to reconsider what the 'Australian Way of Life' was and how it could best be articulated, as 'Old' and 'New' constituents transformed the contours of society and broadened its global vision. While the first decade of the Cold War accelerated the fears of invasion that had traditionally dominated Australian isolationist anxiety, the influx of postwar migration forced a demographic diversification that challenged homogenous understandings of national life. Years of conservative governance were bolstered by economic prosperity and moulded a new cultural type as Australians were encouraged to look inwards to individualism, and backwards to a quiet conformity, in order to uphold notions of a stable 'Way of Life'. Despite efforts to erode Leftist cultural nationalism and nurture new expressions of Australian identity on the Right, both emerged in the mid-twentieth century to confront Australia's 'Way of Life' and to explore how it could be expanded in the increasingly globalised world. These ambitions reached politics by the latter half of the 1960s, and by 1972 the election of the ALP's Gough Whitlam revealed that the majority of Australians had decided 'It's Time' for a reformist political agenda that could dismantle many of the cultural legacies hindering social relations. While fears about Australia's place in the world and concerns over the condition of cultural life have never entirely passed, the years spanning 1947 to 1972 and the constant presence of Cold War tension inspired significant and fruitful debate over what the 'Australian Way of Life' ought to be.

The implications of these findings for contemporary understandings of Australian identity reveal that geographic isolationism, demographic diversity, and ideological contestations about how these factors should be understood are recurring features of Australian national life. While the transitions enacted

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[52] Bongiorno, 'New Progressivism', 181.

[53] Harold Holt, WEH Stanner. RD Huish, AE Monk, and Geoffrey Thomas, 'What do we mean by assimilation of migrants?', interview, *Nation's Forum of the Air*, ABC, no. 2, 1952: 12.

[54] Stuart Ward, '"Culture up to our arseholes": Projecting post-imperial Australia', *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 51, no. 1 (2005): 53–66.

[55] Raymond Sherry, Australian Film Development Corporation Bill 1970, Second reading speech, House of Representatives, 22 April (1970).

during the Cold War period charted throughout this essay have in many cases progressed, with Australia embodying a firmer place in the Asia-Pacific region and undoubtedly remaining a self-professed multicultural country, racial tensions continue to play a significant role in determining the perceived 'Australian Way of Life'. The 2005 Cronulla Riots and dismissal of the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart are just two manifestations of the outcomes of Australian anxieties and ideological polarisations reminiscent of Cold War–era cultural disputes. Demonstrating the persistent saliency of historical analysis in understanding the complexities of present national identities, the Cold War period spanning 1947 to 1972 provides a unique opportunity to consider the orthodoxies and transitions that have shaped Australia's cultural outlook.

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