

Two Books From Australia on the Nation-State

Brief Reviews by David Payne*

A Nation of Our Own
by Robert Birrell

Sociologist Birrell is disturbed by the fact that a whole generation of Australians is growing up looking upon their past with disdain and even shame. This is happening because the history of Australia is in process of being revised by young academics with axes to grind. Feminists, Aborigines and migrant groups gnash their teeth when pondering old accounts of Australia's budding nationhood in which nationalism is seen not only as leading to a new concept of nationhood, but also to social reform. It grates on these groups to think that a society that abused them could possibly have produced anything worthwhile. Marxists further poison the well with their baseless assumption that any and all actions taken by the federationists must have been motivated by a need to keep the masses at bay. Birrell argues point by point against the revisionist positions, and scores well in my opinion. His book is an intellectual response to the "Asianization" policies of the Australian government.

Australia Betrayed

by Graeme Campbell and Mark Uhlmann

While Birrell calmly and rationally argues for the falseness of the revisionist position, Campbell (a member of the Australian House of Representatives) and Uhlmann take a different approach. They assume the falseness of revisionism and try to persuade the mass of Australians that they are in fact being betrayed. Theirs is a well-written, in-your-face plea for "intelligent nationalism," which stresses the importance of maintaining good relations with Asian countries and does not oppose the desirability of becoming better informed about them. Such things must be done, however, without sacrificing the culture and traditions of Australia — without becoming an "Asian nation."

[*A Nation of Our Own* by Robert Birrell. Melbourne: Long Australia Pty Ltd., 1995. 292 pages. Available from the Social Contract Press at \$14.95. *Australia Betrayed* by Graeme Campbell and Mark Uhlmann is published by Foundation Press of Carlisle, Western Australia. © 1995.]

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Not Strangers, But Not Friends

A Quotation From *The Black Sea* by Neil Ascherson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995, \$23.)

"Peoples who live in communion with other peoples, for a hundred or a thousand years, do not always like them — may, in fact, have always disliked them. As individuals, `the others' are not strangers but neighbors, often friends. But my sense of Black Sea life, a sad one, is that latent distrust between different cultures is immortal.

"Necessity, and sometimes fear, binds such communities together. But within the binding-strap they remain a bundle of disparate groups — not a helpful model for the `multi-ethnic' society of our hopes and dreams. It is true that communal savagery — pogroms, `ethnic cleansing' in the name of some fantasy of national unity, genocide — has usually reached the Black Sea communities from elsewhere, an import from the interior. But when it arrives the apparent solidarity of centuries can dissolve within days or hours. The poison, upwelling from the depths, is absorbed by a single breath."

"**In the Strawberry Fields,**" by Eric Schlosser, *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1995, pp. 80-108 is a detailed and evenhanded look at the stoop labor strawberry crop, as grown in California. Here are some tidbits:

- Labor is 50-70% of the cost of growing the crop.
- Migrant workers are cheap in California, largely owing to illegal immigration.
- Guadalupe, California's Latino composition in 1960 was 18%, in 1995 it is 83%.
- The whole system depends on a steady supply of illegal immigrants to keep farm wages low, and to replace migrants who have either returned to Mexico or found better jobs in California.
- The rural population of Mexico has tripled since the 1940s, and now stands at roughly 30 million.
- The SAW (seasonal agricultural worker) amnesty was one of the biggest frauds in American history.

— John Tanton