



THE SIMPSON PRIZE



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“The Anzac tradition has widespread support in Australia despite different historical interpretation on the nature and significance of the Anzac legend.”

The Anzac legend and tradition are deeply ingrained in Australian society, culture and national identity and both played a significant role in laying the groundwork for the patriotic ideals of modern Australia. The Anzac tradition is the commemorative endeavours undertaken in remembrance of those who have served Australia and has garnered widespread support across the nation with many flocking to Dawn Services to commemorate the Service personnel of Australia. Debates from politicians and academics arise concerning the nature and significance of the legend and its role in modern Australia. Despite this, many Australians including students and Veterans believe that the Anzac tradition holds great significance in society and upon observing the tradition and legend closely, there's more to their origins and significance than originally thought. Regardless of continuing debates over its rightful place in Modern Australia, strong cases demonstrating widespread societal support and pride in maintaining the tradition overpower those against it.

Australia's Anzac tradition began in 1916 with the establishment of commemorative ceremonies in honour of those who fought in the war (Australian Embassy, n.d.). The nation had no centralized system of commemoration in the early years, and it wasn't until the mid 1930's that commemorations today associated with Anzac were instituted (National Museum of Australia , 2022). However, there was a discernible fall in the number of people attending Dawn Services between 2015 and 2020, with attendance in Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth falling by 70%-75% (Fathi, 2021). This reduction is first seen as a reliable representation of the supposed waning support for the tradition. However, when observed closely, this is soon disproven. The source of the data states, “Consistent data for regional and rural areas is harder to obtain, but they too have seen a significant fall over the same period.” (Fathi, 2021) Despite this the article's author, academic Romain Fathi, fails to declare if the data gathered is inclusive of some if not all of these areas. If we assume that this data is exclusive and only applies to those in the major cities, then more than 7,220,000 people or 27.8% of the population, as of 2021-2022 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023), is excluded from this data. This number will significantly alter the statistic, rendering unreliable the source's claim that support for the Anzac tradition has plummeted. Moreover, with RSL sub-branches holding community-based services throughout Australia, people are more inclined to attend them instead of inner-city services. This further proves the illegitimacy of Fathi's claims in saying that support for the tradition is waning. With its establishment in 1916 and modernization in the 1930s, the tradition is and always will be a vital part of Australian culture, irrespective of diverse historical interpretations and disagreements over the relevance of the Anzac legend.

The Anzac legend is one of heroism and mateship and holds a significant place in Australian culture. But discussions in its reference to present societal values, strongly influences societal perspective, and hence, whether the legend should be commemorated. Societal values and aspirations have changed since the legend's inception, and discussions over the racial exclusivity of the time influence how people view the legend today and whether it should be

commemorated in modern Australia. However, Indigenous personnel were commemorated for their Service, for example the commemorative window in the Raukkan village church in South Australia, installed in 1925 to honour the Ngarrindjeri men who served in the Australian Imperial Force (The Simpson Prize 2024, 2023). The Anzac legend and its perception are heavily influenced by the values of the time, as the society's view on racial inclusivity changed, the legend has evolved to follow, expanding to include Indigenous personnel. The idea that the legend is reflective of society is analyzed in historian Joan Beaumont's *Broken Nation: Australia in the Great War*, (The Simpson Prize 2024, 2023) and advances the concept that while some perspectives from the past contrast with more modern ones, the foundations of the Anzac legend itself are "civilian values". Beaumont's concept of civilian values is reminiscent of Charles Bean's earlier representation of the Australian soldier as "the product of a distinct...value system" (The Simpson Prize 2024, 2023). Both points gather to form the concept of the legend being intrinsically Australian, and in turn, Australians being intrinsically the legend, regardless of contrasting perspectives. The legend can be reinterpreted into something that reflects everything that Australians value, meaning it exhibits the ability to evolve as the nation does. The legend bends and alters to fit any story of heroism, thus including all who have served Australia, irrespective of race. As Beaumont's "civilian values" are the foundation of the legend, the legend becomes representative of modern Australian values and opinions. In turn, making the Anzac legend forever relevant and worthy of commemoration.

With its establishment in 1916 and remembrance throughout the ensuing decades, the Anzac tradition has been a vital element of Australian culture for over a century. Nonetheless, discussions regarding its nature and meaning in modern Australia, the origins of the tradition, and what it genuinely commemorates are still ongoing in today's society. The Anzac tradition was established initially to commemorate the Gallipoli campaign (Australian Embassy, n.d.), and while it failed as a military offensive, its success in consolidating Australia's international military prominence is regarded by many as the genuine birth of Australia (Crotty, 2022). However, not everyone agrees, and the fact that Australia was already a nation, fighting to aid the Commonwealth, and that a country shouldn't be founded on violence all run counter to the widely held belief that this is Australia's "baptism of fire" (Lewis, n.d.). Historian John Hirst suggests that the Gallipoli Campaign holds great significance for Australia's as it was the first military operation since federation in 1901 and an opportunity to match or perhaps surpass Britain in a task of this magnitude (Hirst, 2014). This proved correct, and Hirst states that renowned British war journalist Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett believed that the efforts of Australian troops in the face of grave danger were superb. Gallipoli, however, isn't considered a significant military achievement by all since it was fought to support the Commonwealth rather than to defend Australia. Paul Keating is one of the individuals who thinks, "Australia was never in need of any redemption at Gallipoli... There was nothing missing in our young nation." (Chan, 2013) In contrast to Keating's assessment, Julia Gillard said, "[Gallipoli] a place shining with honour... Now and forever, we will remember them," during her speech at Anzac Cove, Turkey, on April 25, 2012 (Gillard, 2023). Gillard's words are more accurate than Keating's on the legend's significance and how the tradition is sempiternal for Australians. Debates also call into question what the tradition commemorates. While a minority view it as unnecessary bloodshed, majority of the population see it as commemorating the sacrifice made by brave Australians in all conflicts concerning the nation. The Anzac tradition is a key element of Australia's culture and national identity, despite differing historical appraisal on the nature and significance of the Anzac legend.

Australia's culture and identity are greatly influenced by the Anzac legend and tradition, and while it has been established that they're widely supported by the average population, it's critical to include perspectives of both students and veterans. Anzac Day is an essential component of Australian culture, as shown by a survey completed by 149 year nine students¹. Since 91% of them were raised in Australia, they have had extensive exposure to the tradition, and around 50% have attended at least one Dawn service in the previous five years. Additionally, approximately 90% of respondents believe Anzac Day is significant to Australia's sense of national identity. Overall, the students, are creditable supporters of the tradition and legend. Furthermore, a conversation with members of the Joondalup Sub-Branch of the Returned Services League corroborated being in favor of the Anzac legend and tradition². The consensus that came forth was support for the tradition is undying, and the tradition is an important aspect of our rich history. Anzac Day also serves as a time of respect and recognition for those who have served; it's a chance for comrades and veterans to reconnect over the good, the terrible, and remember those who didn't come home. According to the students and veterans, support for the tradition is unwavering and is a major part of Australian culture.

Since its establishment in 1916, the Anzac tradition has garnered widespread support from the public, as seen by the large attendance at dawn services and other memorial events across Australia. As the Anzac legend evolves along with the nation, it grows stronger and becomes further ingrained in the national psyche. From those who have served Australia, to the students who learn about their sacrifices, they all believe the legend is of utmost importance. While the Anzac legend and tradition are given varying historical evaluations on their nature and significance, they're widely accepted as essential components of Australia's history and national identity.

¹ I personally conducted a survey of my year nine school peers to gather information about the perspectives on Anzac commemoration for this specific age demographic, this research provides an accurate insight into the opinions of the youth.

² An interview I personally conducted with three members of the Returned Services League, Joondalup Sub-branch. The information and opinions that came through from the members are presented.

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