

# Australia Day Reflection

By Fr Andrew Hamilton SJ, 26 January 2021



*Australia Day recalls the arrival of the First Fleet under Governor Phillip in 1778. It marked the beginning of European settlement in Australia and of Indigenous dispossession. For most Indigenous Australians with a sense of their own history, Australia Day is an occasion for grief. For many other Australians, it is an uncomfortable day, one*

*for rumination, for pondering the creation and the destruction of cultures and for revisiting the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the overseas invaders. To understand its significance, however, it is helpful to set the arrival of the first fleet in a broader context, beginning with the arrival of Captain Cook in Botany Bay eight years earlier.*

*This wider point of reference undercuts the suggestion that Australia Day should be moved to another date that all Australians can celebrate. The proposal is superficially attractive, but it could degenerate into yet another attempt to redefine Australia in a way that conceals the dispossession of one race by another. To combine Australia Day with Anzac Day, for example, might say that real Australian history begins with the colonists and that the long story of Indigenous nations and their dispossession are no more than a prelude to a story in which their destined role was to be a relic. It might suggest that their crowning glory for Indigenous Australians was to be invited to fight and to die in British wars on behalf of their conquerors.*

*If, however, we see Australia Day as a day for reflection on the complexity and ambiguity of Australian history, it might invite us to wonder together at the first meeting of cultures and at the richness of each. Against this background, Captain Cook's expedition was not only about discovery and possession and demonstration of superior power. It was about enriching the European world's knowledge of flora and fauna, of mapping universal as well as local seas and skies, of curiosity about the Indigenous peoples encountered on the voyage, of marking points of connection and of haven in the circling of the world. For good or for ill, and in this case great ill, Cook was one of the people who brought very different peoples into contact and collision.*

Read more: <https://catholicoutlook.org/a-reflection-on-australia-day/>