What is a 'Defining Moment' in Australian History?

Thursday 24 September 2015

Dr JANDA GOODING: Welcome to the National Museum of Australia. My name is Janda Gooding and I am Deputy Director of Collections and Content here at the Museum. Just before we commence the more formal part of the proceedings, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land on which we meet tonight, the Ngunnawal and the Ngambri peoples, and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Welcome to the first in a series of panel discussions organised by Radio National and the National Museum of Australia to discuss the National Museum's project Defining Moments in Australian History. Defining Moments will be the centrepiece of the Museum's work for the next two years. We thank Paul Barclay and Radio National for being so committed and enthusiastic in sharing this project with us. There will, in fact, be three more panel discussions about Defining Moments, so stay tuned, check our website, if you want to, sign up to our e-news, and get more information about what's coming up on our program.

It's great to have such a good audience here tonight. Firstly, let me introduce very briefly our panel members: Paul Barclay is the moderator tonight with George Megalogenis, Michelle Arrow, Gideon Haigh and Jackie Huggins. The National Museum and ABC would like to thank the panellists for joining us tonight and in particular for Michelle who stepped in at very short notice.

Tonight's discussion is moderated by Paul Barclay. The discussion and the questions that you might like to ask after he opens up for questions will be recorded and then broadcast on Monday night at 8 p.m. on Radio National. If you want to tweet, we would encourage that. Our hash tag is #nmamoments and our other address is @nma, which is slightly shorter.

As this is the first of the Defining Moments panel discussions, tonight is all about exploring the wider themes around the project: what events might have shaped us as a nation and what are the ones that might continue to define us? Before we get under way though, the co-patron of Defining Moments, the Hon. Michael Kirby, has a short message of welcome. Michael Kirby, together with Michael Ball, raised the idea of a project around great moments in Australian history with the National Museum a few years ago. Their aim was to prompt a national discussion about Australian history. This concept led to the formation of an independent and external advisory board of historians who in 2014 nominated their 100 moments for discussion.

The Museum's role in all of this is to foster that conversation across Australia. After the launch of the project just a year ago, not surprisingly, we've also had hundreds of suggestions from members of the public about events in Australia's history that are

important to them. We invite you or your friends to go on our website and make a comment or suggest a moment that you think should be considered as one of the 100 defining moments.

Mr Kirby could not be here tonight but wanted to welcome you all personally. So here is a short video address from the Hon. Michael Kirby.

[video played]

Hon. MICHAEL KIRBY: I'm Michael Kirby and I'm a patron of Defining Moments. I welcome you to this exposition of the history of Australia – the history of the Australian people. Too many people get by in their lives without really thinking about that subject. The object of the Defining Moments project is to encourage us all to think about where we came from and thereby to understand where we are and perhaps have a glimpse of where we're going.

The project originated in the mind of an Australian businessman Michael Ball. He was a person who had spent his life in advertising and communication and he was just the right person to stimulate a group of Australians to try to define the 100 most important moments in our history, those that helped to define us. Naturally, we sought the advice of some of the top historians in Australia. We asked Geoffrey Blainey; we sought the assistance of Marilyn Lake, John Hirst and other historians, and citizens of different backgrounds. We consulted widely. We had to have pre-history and modern history. We had to have the Indigenous people and the settlers and their descendants. We had to have people from different parts of the world who have come to Australia and we had to have the good and the bad in our history.

Now, of course, there was a lot of difference about what should make up the list of the top 100, but that shouldn't concern us. We should rejoice in the fact that we are a democratic and sometimes a disputatious people. The fact that there are differences is healthy and the fact that we can have debates and that we can express our views quite strongly as to what is left out and what should be in, that's what's exciting about this project.

We decided that we wouldn't concentrate only on physical things and that we would concentrate in the medium by which most people today get their news information and controversial opinions – through the Internet and through electronic and digital means.

So this is the Defining Moments project and these are the defining moments which have been selected. But you don't have to agree with our selection and you should engage your mind and your spirit and your heart in considering what we've left out and what should be put in.

[end of video]

Dr JANDA GOODING: We thank Mr Kirby for his enthusiasm and continuing support for this project. I think you can sense that the panel is going to take on his challenge and perhaps argue with some of the moments that have been put on the initial list. But that's what it's all about. I'm going to hand over to Paul and the panel now. I'm sure we are all looking forward to a very robust and interesting discussion this evening.

PAUL BARCLAY: Thank you, Janda. Hello and welcome. It's terrific to be here at the National Museum of Australia. As you've heard, I'm Paul Barclay from ABC RN (Radio National) and this event is being recorded for my program *Big Ideas*. It will be broadcast Monday night at 8 p.m. on RN and will be available for download and podcast – slightly before that time actually. As soon as it's put together, we'll put it out there for you to download. So friends, family and anyone who couldn't make it tonight, let them know about it.

What are the moments that define us as a nation and a people, and how have these moments shaped who we are today? An initial list, as you've just heard, of 100 moments has been put together by a panel of eminent historians for the Museum. It's a starting point for a national conversation and is not meant to be definitive. In fact, the list's omissions and inclusions have already generated some disagreement from some of the panelists, as you'll hear tonight.

Is the 2014 free trade agreement with the United States, which is on the list, really that important or is the realignment of our national and economic interests with China, is that the genuinely defining moment for Australia in the 21st century? Should 1788 be regarded as a defining moment because it's the year Captain Arthur Phillip established a convict settlement at Sydney Cove or is it a defining moment because it heralded the dispossession of the original inhabitants, the Indigenous Australians of their land? There are plenty of arguments to be had, which is entirely the point of this list. As Michael Kirby said. If you don't like it, you're free to challenge it. You can, of course, get on the tweetersphere to do so and get involved in the conversation, both now and after this discussion: #nmamoments and@rnbigideas if you whack them in your tweets.

Tonight we're going to kick off the conversation by getting a sense of what our panel thinks and we'll conclude with 15 minutes or so of your questions and comments. When it's time to come to you, please be as concise as you can be, which means we'll get better value out of that 15 minutes.

The panel have been putting their thinking caps on. Let me introduce them to you. On my immediate left is George Megalogenis, author and journalist. His book *The Australian Moment* won the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Non-Fiction, as well as a Walkley. It was the basis for the ABC documentary *Making Australia great*. He has just released – yesterday in fact – his new book *Australia's second chance: What our history tells us about*

our future, which I'm sure he'll draw on tonight and which, just quietly, will be on sale in the foyer later on.

Next to George, Michelle Arrow who is associate professor of modern history at Macquarie University in Sydney where she teaches and researches Australian history. She's the author of two books: *Friday on our minds: Popular culture in Australia* and *Upstaged: Australian women playwrights in the limelight at last*, both of which were nominated for prizes. She's currently working on a history of the 1970s in Australia and she was co-winner of the New South Wales Premier's Multimedia History Prize for the RN radio documentary *Public Intimacies: the 1974 Royal Commission on Human Relationships*.

Next to Michelle we have Gideon Haigh, who has been a journalist for almost 30 years. He's a prolific author who's written an astonishing 30 books and edited seven others. He's won so many awards for his writing that time prevents me from listing them all. Suffice to say, some of his recent winning titles include: *On Warne* – that's cricketer Shane Warne by the way. It really begs the question: Did that ball that Warne bowled to Mike Gatting constitute in the 1993 Ashes series a defining moment for Australia?

GIDEON HAIGH: It did for Mike Gatting.

PAUL BARCLAY: But I digress. His other books are *The Office*, *Uncertain Corridors*, *Writing on Modern Cricket*, *End of the Road*, *The Deserted Newsroom* and countless others.

Next to Gideon we have Jackie Huggins AM, an author, historian and Aboriginal rights activist of the Bidjara in Central Queensland and the Birri-Gubba Juru North Queensland peoples. She's the director of the Telstra Foundation and adjunct professor at the Australian National University's Australian Centre for Indigenous History. Jackie is also author of *Sister Girl* and co-author with Rita Huggins of the critically acclaimed biography *Auntie Rita*.

Please make our fantastic panel welcome. [applause]

PAUL BARCLAY: Jackie, you were one of the historians charged with the task of helping to put together the founding 100 moments. How did you go about it?

JACKIE HUGGINS: Yes, I'm clutching my notes there very seriously.

PAUL BARCLAY: It's a tough task, isn't it?

JACKIE HUGGINS: It was no mean feat actually. I didn't have the pleasure of meeting Michael Kirby and Michael Ball – that's why I was very impressed in the first place to join. I came onto the scene in the two last meetings where the list was … rigid but not set. Amongst those wonderful other historians we produced something that we thought maybe it's not the defining, Defining Moments definite list – if you get my drift – but one which could open up discussion and national debate. And it certainly has.

We’re hoping to join the dots somewhere there. Of course, there are gaps; there are things that have been missing. I can tell you, Paul, that we really agonised. I had sleepless nights myself over some of the ones that got dropped, particularly Cathy Freeman and the Olympic Games. But I noticed this has been picked up in the ‘your list’, which is the list out there that’s going around. So that’s rather nice.

We weren’t particularly tasked with looking at our specialist area. It was a very democratic and a kind of measured and considered brain dump amongst us. I was privileged to be on the panel with another Indigenous historian Professor John Maynard, which I felt quite comfortable about. John knows his stuff as well.

The process was, I guess, what we had to weigh up in terms of those defining moments that we thought were defining moments. They were carefully considered and discussed. Obviously some of the classics are not included there. It’s almost like a ‘where’s Wally’, after reading your list. How did the nation change? What did we see as the true legacy and the true outstanding moment of that? And also we looked at in terms of the longevity of that defining moment: did it actually stop there or did it actually change society and go on for a number of years?

PAUL BARCLAY: And also the defining moments are not necessarily moments that make us feel good about ourselves or our history.

JACKIE HUGGINS: No.

PAUL BARCLAY: There’s a broad few that I can pick up on. There’s the Myall Creek massacre, for example, that terrible stain in Australian history where a gang of settlers slaughtered a group of Aboriginal people. There’s the enshrining of the White Australia policy. There’s even the extinction of the Tasmanian tiger, all of which tell us something about the settling of Australia and the history of Australia that’s not necessarily putting us in the best light.

JACKIE HUGGINS: That’s right. We had to look at the unpalatables of history, because they are our history. We need to know them and we need to acknowledge that they existed, particularly, of course, the brutal history of my people in this country and I guess the continued trauma that exists because of colonisation for our people and how it’s acted out in our society today. So certainly we looked at the good, the bad and the ugly.

I think also it was about those aha moments that make us wake up, that make us look at ourselves and make us, for good or bad, feel this happened. Surely we won’t see a repeat of that but we can move together; we can move on with our history, but to acknowledge it, to understand it, to clearly know that it happened. A lot of that stuff has been invisible up until recently. History has always been written by the winners. However, we’re seeing a number

of our Aboriginal historians write that history and retell those stories. That's very encouraging.

PAUL BARCLAY: So George, migration is a cornerstone of the Australian story. With the exception of Australia's first peoples, we are all either migrants or descended from them. You've pointed to the assisted passage of migrants from the UK in the 1830s and 1840s as a defining moment. How so?

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: So this is not on the list. In fact, there are only two decades not represented on the list – the 1820s when the first semblance of not representative government but the governor lost the power of the autocrat. So Macquarie was the last of the governors who was established as an autocrat in Australia, and there was the beginnings of the movement to parliamentary democracy, which is the 1820s, a decade left off this list.

The other decade that's left off this list is the 1840s. An economic historian looking at the full sweep of data will pick out the 1840s as the most extraordinary decade in Australia's development, because that was the decade our national income literally doubled because of the assisted passage wave and the war boom. Pretty much every other society on the planet at the time had some version of an extended depression. They were known as the Hungry Forties in Britain. There was a shocking famine in Ireland which, over the course of half a dozen to a dozen years, saw a million people die and two million people emigrate. There was revolution across the continent in Europe in 1848.

That decade was the standout decade for Australia when it marked itself as a settlement almost separated from the global economy at the time. It was soon after when gold was discovered that we became the world's richest people. The first year that we were top of the global income ladder was 1852. The thing I wanted to suggest is that we are actually missing the key thing that defines us as a prosperous migrant nation. And that's in the mid-1830s, following a decision in London, Governor [Richard] Bourke actively recruited for the first time migrants from Britain – actively recruited shepherds, tradesmen and domestic servants. The first couple of boats were kind of to his satisfaction, the third wasn't to his satisfaction. His dispatches tell us that he thought that there were too many loose women on that particular boat – his definition not necessarily aligned with the facts but that's how he viewed it.

After the first couple of assisted passage boats, which were essentially boats filled at London's end to what London thought was New South Wales's needs, suddenly became – and this is policy adapted very quickly – to the colony being an active recruiter. This is even before race cards are played in colonial politics on the goldfields and later with people like [Henry] Parkes stopping the Chinese from landing. This was an act of a positive choice to decide the content of the immigration program.

The reason why I suggest it as a defining moment is that you can't explain Australia today without looking at that particular period in our history, because in the preceding 40-something years – close to 50 years – of convict settlement, each year between 1788 and 1836 there were more convicts arriving than free settlers. It wasn't until the colonies decided to recruit – that is, by paying the boat fare from Britain to Australia – that suddenly we took off as a prosperous migrant nation.

GIDEON HAIGH: Perhaps that illustrates the difficulty of thinking of history as a succession of defining moments. It's very difficult to reduce those practices, those kind of evolutions, to a series of single decisions. What we're talking about here is a couple of very important historical failures.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: I was actually thinking: How would you define the moment? Basically pick the boat that Caroline Chisholm came on, because Caroline Chisholm was part of that first assisted passage wave, the big ones, between 1838 and 1841. In fact, the people that came over those four years overtopped the existing population. In four years you basically created a new Australia that literally overtopped the people that had been here the previous 50 years.

PAUL BARCLAY: And then the 1850s came and, as you mentioned, the gold rushes. I was reading your book actually last night, and it struck me just how profound an impact the gold rushes had. By 1854, Victoria had trebled in size as a result of the gold rushes. Its population was bigger at the time than California's and New South Wales.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: And New South Wales. It was a late starter, so Melbourne –

PAUL BARCLAY: And it became a globally discussed city at the time. Didn't it?

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Yes, the most visited port in the entire globe in 1852 was Melbourne. As I said, that was also the year we became the world's richest people measured by GDP [gross domestic product] per capita. In fact, the most extraordinary thing – I must admit I didn't know this until I looked it up – a lot of these events are actually covered in the 1850s. There is very precise discovery of gold; rebellion at Eureka of course; first railway line opens; secret ballot; eight-hour day; invention of Aussie rules – very important, probably the most significant moment as it affects my identity as a Richmond supporter.

But here is the thing about the 1840s. That period, where essentially the first run-up in prosperity occurred, was distributed fairly equally. I dug out some contemporary accounts from the press in Britain. If you landed in Australia, you would on arrival be guaranteed a job that paid two or three times the going rate in Britain – and remember these are the Hungry Forties in Britain. No wonder we were such a people magnet in those days, even with the

fares being paid. Of course, by the 1850s, people were paying their own way to come here. We had already earnt a reputation.

The 1850s is probably the singlemost important decade in Australia's development. Our particular model of democracy was forged not just in Eureka, because obviously there were parallel developments in some of the other colonies. As I say, the list really starts to heat up by the time you get to the 1850s.

GIDEON HAIGH: What does separation mean in terms of that discussion? What does the rivalry between colonies mean to Australia's development?

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: That's at the point – because it all happened very quickly. There's a guy called Earl Grey who was colonial secretary and who was not that keen on giving the Australian colonies self-government. He'd quite happily given it to the Canadians but he had a particular chip on his shoulder, he thought we hadn't overcome our convict past. If he actually understood demography, he could've counted up the Australians that were living in the various colonies in the early 1850s and worked out that what remained of the convict population was a fraction of the total population and that most of the people who had come here were drawn from the middle classes of the world.

Once you separate – and they all got separation around the same time. New South Wales kind of had a form of self-government before the others. Once they got separated, depending on the composition of these settlements – so South Australia and sort of Port Phillip and then Victoria were free settlements, and they had a particular character. New South Wales, which was an older settlement, tended to be a little more corrupt, a little more agro. Queensland, which separated later in 1859, had a peculiar rhythm to it.

PAUL BARCLAY: Still does have a peculiar rhythm to it.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: That's your comment, not mine. I won't comment. It still fascinates because I've spent a lot of time re-reading the record and the list prompts me again how fast we went from nothing to the world's richest people.

PAUL BARCLAY: This is a really interesting point, and I am going to bring Gideon in on this. But before I do, I think we need to make mention of the fact that immigration has been contested throughout Australia's history. It is contested all of the time. You've got these people at the moment – the Reclaim Australia mob contesting it. Yet, as you clearly point out, there is a direct correlation between our prosperity and these periods of mass migration.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Periods of Australia's greatest prosperity – this is not just GDP growth, this is GDP per capita, this is standard of living – are associated with mass migration. The flip side of that story is that, when the doors were closed, when we went to

racial selection under White Australia and the tariff, and some of the follow-up consequences of White Australia in the 1920s when it became the British Australia policy, when we were imposing quotas on the Italians and trying to keep the Greeks out, and when we tried to keep the Maltese out – they are periods of profound economic under-performance. I know that sounds like a clunky way of putting it.

Australia shot so far above the rest of the world when it was open. National income basically quadrupled between 1835 and 1891. Our nearest rival was America over that period, and they only doubled their national income. So no settlement had flown as high and as quick.

But the period of White Australia, the first half century of White Australia – you can carbon date White Australia at about 1888 when the Chinese were stopped on the Afghan boat. For that next 50 years Australia was the weakest economy on the planet. Even Japan was growing faster than us. Certainly every country in Europe grew faster than us. In fact, for the first 40 years of that 50-year period, by about 1931 at the bottom of the Depression, our national income was lower than it was at the peak of the boom in 1891.

PAUL BARCLAY: Let me bring you in, Gideon. You also think that the fact that Australia has become this incredibly prosperous nation is something that indeed we take for granted actually but it is a key part of our story and it is a key part of the defining moments within our story. Perhaps you can talk a bit to that.

GIDEON HAIGH: I did think when I looked through the history what a remarkably continuous, harmonious and peaceful history it was with relatively little to do with war. It was actually good on this list, I didn't think that Australia's martial traditions were over-emphasised. Few natural disasters, no revolutions, no civil war, no coups d'état, no political purges, no kind of convulsive territorial disputes, no secessions, no plagues, famines or pestilences – some of that is luck but it is an incredibly blessed record when you review it.

PAUL BARCLAY: Frontier wars though, Gideon, perhaps we will come to those.

GIDEON HAIGH: Difficult to distil to defining moments, because it is a continuous process. Perhaps we have to return to that issue of definition before. Prosperity has not only been an improver of our material sense of well-being but has also had a significant symbolic quotient in Australia. The idea of developing Australian resources – not just exporting Australian resources but developing it at the same time – providing the wealth for the toil to go with the golden soil.

George will probably talk about this later, the pronounced decline of Australia following the depression of the 1890s. We have a longer depression than any other country elsewhere in the world because of the collapse of our commodity-based economy. That leads to a sense

that Australia has to take steps to take control of its own destiny. It oversteps the mark; it puts the rest of the world at arm's length.

One of the historical dates I have always quite liked and one that I've gone back to again and again is I think one of the formative dates of Australian history is 24 April 1915 – not 25th but the 24th – because it's the date of the pouring of the first steel ingot at BHP Newcastle. That meant that, for the next 75 years, we had a city that was kind of identified with this very muscular and masculine industry but also this extremely complicated history where we turned our own raw materials into steel for our own uses. I think that was an important industry not only in terms of its contribution to economic well-being but a sense of kind of national pride.

The other industry that has a similar symbolic quotient – it's mentioned in the list here – is the production of the first Holden car, the 48-215. That actually is interesting because I think it's probably underestimated what an act of political courage that was from the Labor Party of that period, from [John] Curtin and then [Ben] Chifley, to override Labor's concerns about foreign domination and monopoly power. To back off from the idea of the car industry as a state-owned enterprise, which they did countenance during the Second World War, and to back Australia to make things. I think it's one of the reasons why this moment always appears on our lists and we always see in our mind's eye that image of Chifley standing by the first Holden.

The other moment – it's a phase more than a moment and it does appear here as a kind of a moment – is that period in the second half of the 1950s where another act of political courage from John McEwen and his fellow apparatchiks in the Department of Trade lead the economic rapprochement with Japan. We sign the first trade agreement with them in 1957; we have another agreement with them in 1960; we abolish the embargo on iron ore. We go from an estimation of Japan as this formidable depraved enemy that we'd been fighting little more than a decade earlier to them being our largest trading partner by the end of the 1960s. That is an extraordinary transformation. We also absorb immigration from Europe – some of our former enemies there, Italy and Germany. We probably come to terms with the peace perhaps quicker than any other nation in the world.

PAUL BARCLAY: Okay. Enough of the serious economic stuff. Michelle, let's talk about the middle part of last century. You've identified the introduction of television into Australia, 1956; is that right?

MICHELLE ARROW: Yes, it was introduced pretty much in time for the Olympics so it was one of the first things that was broadcast on television. One of the interesting things about the list is that it's inevitably going to have more public events than it is private events. There is that sense that defining moments are events that governments do something, a piece of legislation is passed and all of that stuff. Of course, television had to have – there was a

royal commission into television before it was introduced; there was great debate about whether television should be introduced to Australia or not. [Robert] Menzies I think was very keen to put it off. I don’t think he was very keen to introduce TV at all. Yet there was a sense that Australia was lagging behind the rest of the world, because many countries had television before Australia got it.

It’s interesting there is that kind of government process around the introduction of TV, but the introduction of TV is something that transformed individuals’ lives, family life. There was a lot of discussion about what room in the house it should be in, where it should go, should you eat your dinner before you watch the TV or not? In terms of its impact on everyday lives, I think television is one of those hugely significant defining moments. But again, when it was first introduced most people watched it through a shop window. People didn’t have televisions.

PAUL BARCLAY: But it was a disruptive technology, wasn’t it?

MICHELLE ARROW: Totally disruptive. I think it had enormous impacts for radio; it had enormous impacts for cinema - a lot of cinemas closed. People were writing ‘television killed me’ on the cinema doors when they closed down. It had enormous implications for things like sport. Suddenly broadcasting rights become much more important than gate takings for sport, so that again has all kinds of flow-on effects.

PAUL BARCLAY: We get to see ourselves reflected back at ourselves through this medium, don’t we, for the first time really?

MICHELLE ARROW: Exactly. I think that’s one of the most significant things. Radio shows like *Blue Hills* were giving people a sense of what the Australian voice sounded like in Australian stories. But with television, particularly by the time you get to the 1970s and 1980s where you get the golden age of serial drama and mini-series, it was the most effective medium for telling Australian stories back to people. Really now the idea of event television has sort of receded somewhat because people are downloading things and watching on demand.

I remember being a kid and watching those mini-series, and everybody was watching them because that was it. That was the moment where everybody got together. So I think television provided something of a common language for Australians. It’s interesting that no television programs are on this list in some ways, because obviously there is a defining moment and there’s a defining moment. But I do think there are moments we have experienced through television like 9/11, for example.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Should we have colour television in there as well?

MICHELLE ARROW: I think perhaps we should bung in colour television.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: So Gough Whitlam dismissed in the year that colour television is introduced to Australia.

MICHELLE ARROW: That's right – put them together.

JACKIE HUGGINS: I remember back in the day living where I grew up in Inala in Brisbane, and we used to have one of those televisions that you had to put the money in. I'm older than anyone on the panel. Does anybody remember that?

GIDEON HAIGH: Pay TV.

JACKIE HUGGINS: It was kind of like a pay TV. Some people in the audience do remember that. I remember every pension week we'd watch a lot of television, but then the thing would go zap and it would just cut out.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Where did the money go?

JACKIE HUGGINS: It was amazing. It went to the little man who collected it every fortnight, the television man.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: What did he give you in return? Was it the milkman doing the run at the same time?

JACKIE HUGGINS: Something like that.

PAUL BARCLAY: You were saying, Michelle, there are no television programs on the list. I was wondering whether or not *Number 96* should be on the list. I may be wrong but is it not the first time that we see an openly gay Australian character on the TV screen?

MICHELLE ARROW: Yes. In fact, Michael Kirby is on the box set of *Number 96* that has been produced talking about how important that was. It's interesting that we have the Mardi Gras march as one of the events there. Clearly that was a significant event. If it had only been a one-off it wouldn't be on the list, but it's important because it's the first. A lot of these things are firsts, which I think is interesting.

Something like *Number 96* was important because – of course it was a product of the sexual revolution as much as anything else – it had a gay character in it who was not a stereotype. He wasn't a Mr Humphreys on *Are you being served?* and he wasn't a murderer or a kind of crazed character like a lot of the characters on *Number 96* were. A lot of people in my research talked about how important that was to see a gay man on television that seemed someone like you. There's the power of something like popular culture in that it can reflect changing realities and make people feel more comfortable and at home in their own skin, which I think is important.

PAUL BARCLAY: One recent moment that seemed defining to – I'm assuming – many of us in the room was the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, Jackie. It had real symbolic power, as do many of the moments actually on the list – they have symbolic power. But with the National Apology you don't have to look very far to find people who were disappointed with the follow-up to that apology. It does make me wonder: are symbols important as defining moments or we should be looking for the substance behind the symbols?

JACKIE HUGGINS: Great question. I would probably go for the substance behind that, as I said before, just in terms of longevity of that defining moment and where it has taken us. For instance, with the national apology, Kevin Rudd, the then Prime Minister, put in place Close the Gap measurements for Indigenous people and departments that were responsible, other service providers. But mostly it was around the COAG agreements and the departments that were responsible for the social wellbeing of Aboriginal people – not only that but incarceration rates, et cetera. Sadly, we saw the last Close the Gap report was quite dismal in fact.

PAUL BARCLAY: It's an annual report card really, isn't it?

JACKIE HUGGINS: It's an annual report card.

PAUL BARCLAY: And it is just bleak most years, it has to be said.

JACKIE HUGGINS: Yes. It's just showing that in many respects we're going backwards rather than going forwards. The Apology was one of those incredible times. I was sitting in the gallery. I remember first hand just the euphoria of people in our nation – much like the bridge walks in 2000 – the euphoria that our people said, 'You know what. I don't think white fellas cared this much about us or would come and support us and join us'. But still it doesn't deny that we are still plagued with those horrible social ills that we still have within our communities – high incarceration rates, children not being educated, health statistics, et cetera. There is still a festering sore, I think, in terms of these defining moments but what they have meant or where they have led.

I'm not saying it's all gloom and doom because it's not. There have been some brilliant outcomes. We see about 150 of our own doctors; we have lawyers; we have engineers. I taught a young fellow that wanted to be our first Aboriginal astronaut at the University of Queensland. So these things are changing, but we're still very much plagued with a whole range of social ills that we should have tackled by now.

PAUL BARCLAY: One of the things that's interesting on the list – the list of 100 that we're agreeing and disagreeing with – is the activity in the 1960s and 1970s around Indigenous issues and Indigenous affairs. We have the Wave Hill walk-off of Aboriginal cattlemen from the Vesteys' cattle station led by Vincent Lingiari in 1966 – a very big moment because not

only were they protesting against poor wages and conditions but this was to morph into the Aboriginal land right movement.

We then had in 1967 the referendum and the incredible support it drew. If you know much about the failure rate of Australian referenda you'd know just how significant that victory was. You then have in 1972 the tent embassy set up. And in 1976 finally Fraser making good on Whitlam's promise for national land rights. It seems like a period where there's lots happening and a lot that is actually positive is happening in that time.

JACKIE HUGGINS: Yes, it was a really little hot spot, that period. Of course, we were very much influenced by what was happening in the civil rights movement over in the States and in the women's movement as well. We were in globalisation then, even though I didn't even know what globalisation was until my 40s, I think. These events overseas were defining what we could be and what was possible in our own country – very much that timing.

I was a young girl then. Sometimes I get a bit anxious when people say, 'Well nothing has changed for us,' but it has. It may be glacial in places but things have changed since these times. But they were great times. I can't remember it as an adult but certainly as a young child it was all around me. I was surrounded by it. You can't help but be informed by that or grow with that.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Jackie and Gideon alluded to this earlier – the interesting thing about that period when you do set it against what was happening in the United States is that even though technically we followed them, we didn't do it their way.

JACKIE HUGGINS: No.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: The freedom-riders weren't getting shot by rednecks; you weren't getting state troopers mowing down peaceful protesters as they approached the state assembly; you didn't have the beginnings of an undeclared civil war between black and white – you had something else. You had Australians going: 'Not only is this a big idea and a good idea, we're going to overwhelm you with a big yes.' What I didn't realise – I have only just started reading up on it, and Megan Davis has just written a book on constitutional recognition – was that this wasn't the top of mind issue for Harold Holt in that referendum. When the vote came in at 90 per cent, he was more worried about the second question which didn't pass, which was the relative position between the House of Representatives and the Senate.

JACKIE HUGGINS: That is right, yes.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: He was worried about the game of politics.

JACKIE HUGGINS: We got there by default as usual.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: It's a big 90 per cent yes vote and there is very little reporting of it in the prime ministerial response to it. I had no idea about that.

MICHELLE ARROW: Because no-one offered a no case in 1967 on that case.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: They assumed it wasn't controversial.

MICHELLE ARROW: Yes. There was enormous goodwill around that – we were talking about this before – partly because I think there was a sense of we are voting to give Aboriginal people equal rights, and of course that wasn't precisely what the question was. But FCAATSI [Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders], the organisation that campaigned and organised the yes case, very much emphasised that. I think it's remembered in hindsight in slightly misleading ways – it's when Aboriginal people got the vote, and all that kind of stuff. We tend to remember some of these events quite differently. That was interesting that Holt –

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: He was fretting about the question that didn't get up.

GIDEON HAIGH: It's a little bit like the 'we look to America' article that Curtin wrote, which seems to have been written by his press secretary and slipped in to the *Herald* on a slow news day, and has since been remembered this as a transformational moment in Australian history where we change our perspective on looking to Britain to looking to the US. It's all really condensed to a single phrase, but in fact John Curtin was as capable of being a toadying Anglophile as Robert Menzies.

PAUL BARCLAY: Just I suppose bringing together some of these Indigenous issues and statements with our national obsession being sport and coming back to the point that Jackie made earlier, the moment that I don't think made it into the final list of Cathy Freeman winning the gold medal at the Sydney Olympic Games – once again, one of those things as a sports fan, as an Australian generally, it felt like a huge moment on the Olympic track, a rare gold medal by an Indigenous Australian happening at a time when we were struggling with this issue of reconciliation. I loved that moment but then, at the end of the day, Gideon, you say 'she won a race and it's a sport'. How do we evaluate that?

GIDEON HAIGH: I didn't say that. I want to hear from Jackie why it's not on the list.

PAUL BARCLAY: How do we evaluate the actual significance of an event like that, do you think?

GIDEON HAIGH: I have always liked that line of Greg Dening's who said that 'Nothing is so fleeting as sporting achievement and nothing so lasting as the recollection of it.'

PAUL BARCLAY: That's a great line.

GIDEON HAIGH: Because it does come down to moments, doesn't it?

MICHELLE ARROW: Yes.

GIDEON HAIGH: It's often illusory but you do seem to be able to see the trajectory of history changing in the stroke of a bat.

PAUL BARCLAY: It felt so big that moment, didn't it, Jackie?

JACKIE HUGGINS: It did. It was a moment in our history when the world stopped. I travelled overseas and everyone said to me, Indigenous people said, 'She not only ran for you but she ran for us' – this theme and concept of globalisation.

PAUL BARCLAY: That sense that she had this nation on her shoulders.

JACKIE HUGGINS: Yes, she did.

GIDEON HAIGH: The pressure on her is unimaginable and on this one night, this perfect night in our perfect city at this moment where the whole world is watching, she wins. It's like a perfect moment.

MICHELLE ARROW: It's also one of those moments in hindsight. At the time I think the Sydney Olympics were not an event I would put on this list. I think Cathy Freeman's race was, as you delve into it, it's because of the moment of the refusal to apologise by John Howard, the reconciliation movement and all those things, that sense of expectation that was fulfilled that she managed to pull it off which I think was incredibly special. It's one of those things where I think it appears on the people's list of moments; it doesn't appear on the official list.

GIDEON HAIGH: I was at the supermarket when she won because I thought it would be nice and quiet.

PAUL BARCLAY: Oh, Gideon.

MICHELLE ARROW: It was because I think everybody was down at the Sydney Harbour watching the race.

PAUL BARCLAY: It would have been a very empty supermarket, Gideon.

GIDEON HAIGH: I hate shopping.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Because Jackie was privy to this discussion, if you think about what the sporting moments selected tell us, and the 21st century sporting moments that were selected, we've got Bodyline because that sort of plays to our victimhood in the middle of the Depression and the fact that we didn't riot, which is the subtext. No-one jumped the fence.

GIDEON HAIGH: You could put [Otto Niemeyer, Bank of England] in there with Bodyline, couldn't you – the tensions between England and Australia at the time.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Okay, say the Germans had played the Greeks, because Niemeyer and the Premiers' Plan was the equivalent of the Greek austerity package that's been imposed by Europe today. So the Germans are playing Greeks in soccer and they go the biff in Athens. Would they not have jumped the fence? They probably would. But Australians for whatever reason didn't jump the fence in 1932–1933 because it does play to our victimhood. But you don't have Cathy Freeman on the list, which is achievement.

JACKIE HUGGINS: It is.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: That's the dichotomy for me. If you're going to have a sporting event –

MICHELLE ARROW: We love our victims though.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: I know.

GIDEON HAIGH: One hundred one defining moments, we can do it.

JACKIE HUGGINS: I guess why we chose the reconciliation walk over the Sydney Harbour Bridge is that it was the start of something really big in this country. In fact, the people who walked over Sydney Harbour Bridge were bigger than the Vietnam moratorium marches in this country. It was the biggest march in this country. People don't know that. Around the country there were a million people that marched.

What did this say to our people? What did it say to Australians? We were definitely united in that moment, as we were with Cathy Freeman quite clearly. However, this had a bit of a longer road to run, pardon the pun, in terms of what could we actually get out of this? This was an incredible time. With Cathy – great, she won the race; we're all very proud. But what did that see for us? Did it change anything? Were there partnerships formed? Perhaps yes around corporates, sponsoring bodies, whatever. I guess that's why we went with the walks and the longevity of that.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Did you see it as an either/or given that you were talking about the same year?

JACKIE HUGGINS: It was actually. I wish we could have got them both in but we were heading towards that 100, the golden 100. I don't know why we couldn't get over. It should have been 105 or something – or 102.

PAUL BARCLAY: It does come back to this thing about how you define what a defining moment is and how do you define a moment that accompanies an important change or revolution in society. So, Michelle, in that context, I was trying to think of the same wave of

feminism and women's liberation and a moment at which we can say something changed in that regard. I suppose you could have brought up the publication of *The Female Eunuch* – maybe.

MICHELLE ARROW: I was just thinking about that.

PAUL BARCLAY: But the list has the oral contraceptive being introduced in 1961, the ability of women all of a sudden to have better control over their own fertility, which I imagine then leads more women to join the work force and opens up the contemporary contribution that women now make to society.

MICHELLE ARROW: Exactly. The other event that is there is the equal pay decision. If you think about the contraceptive pill, it gives more women control over their fertility, you have more women entering the part-time work force, partly as a result of having a lot of perhaps increases in household debt but also more women wanting to get back into the work force. So you have that sense that the pill unlocks a whole lot of things. While it is not necessarily a defining event in itself, I think the repercussions it has are quite considerable: women start to go into the work force or are wanting to go into the work force; child care is very difficult to get; other issues that come up around equal pay – and they are the kinds of issues that bubble to the surface by the end of the 1960s. Also as Jackie was pointing out with the Indigenous movement, the kind of influence of American literature and British literature, and British ideas with women's liberation.

I heard a couple of very longstanding women's liberationists talking yesterday. They were saying, 'Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* was great because it was a work of popular feminism but we sort of already knew what she was saying.' I think with *The Female Eunuch*, you could have put that on there because that's the book that every man talks about getting hit over the head with. Some woman reading it going, 'You're a terrible husband.'

PAUL BARCLAY: It's also one of those books that's referenced continually by people that you suspect never read the book in the first place.

MICHELLE ARROW: That's exactly right. But I think with the women who did read it, you certainly heard a lot of women who did read it and talked about it as being a life-shaping moment. Again that's that question around the public and the private. What's really interesting in this list – there was one famous historian who said there was no renaissance for women. You talk about how an event is understood publicly, how an historical epoch is understood publicly, but for many people their lives don't change. They're not shaped by these moments.

GIDEON HAIGH: As a companion to that, one historical episode that interests me, partly because I've written a book about it, is the Menhennitt ruling which clarified the

circumstances under which a woman could have a lawful abortion in Victoria and it wasn't even reported in the following day's paper. It was just a common law ruling given by a judge in the course of a case involving the prosecution of a man who had been arrested for abortion. It happens almost out of sight, out of mind at a time where really circumstances couldn't have changed any other way, because at the time Henry Bolte ruled Victoria with the help of DLP preferences so he was quite heavily enmeshed with Catholic politics. It was very difficult for a politician to do anything under those circumstances. It required a bit of judicial activism by this very improbable judicial activist Cliff Menhennitt, who was a trade practices lawyer by background, who gave a ruling that continued to serve women in Victoria until they changed the law back in 2008.

PAUL BARCLAY: It still is difficult, Gideon. In Queensland abortion remains in the Criminal Code, and under a left wing feminist Labor premier two kids were charged with procuring an illegal abortion. If it wasn't for an eminently sensible jury, who actually probably by the letter of the law should have found them guilty, instead said 'this is ludicrous' – if it wasn't for them these two teenage kids from Cairns would have gone to jail several years ago. Anyway, that's now and not then.

I want to stay in the more contemporary past. The Lindy Chamberlain case was something that you mentioned to me also, Michelle, as one of those moments. Talk a bit about that. I was at high school at the time. I can remember it was something that preoccupied all of us. The one thing I remember about it is that almost everybody in my outer suburban Melbourne high school believed she was guilty on the basis of virtually no evidence. That's my enduring memory of that time.

MICHELLE ARROW: Yes. I think that's probably the case with a lot of people that that's the memory. One of the things that's interesting about this list is that I think there are two ways you can talk about a defining moment: there's a formative moment, so white women get the vote in 1902. That's a kind of formative moment because that creates all kind of change.

You also have these extraordinary moments, they're abnormal, they're traumatic events, they're bushfires. I noticed Cyclone Tracy is on the list. You have these one-off events, the Bali bombings – things that are highly memorable. Whether they're significant and what sort of impact they have is often – you could look at Cyclone Tracy and say that changed the way that buildings were built in Darwin. So that does have a significant effect. But it also is this cumulative trauma that it has in many lives.

I think Lindy Chamberlain, the disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain and the four inquests into her disappearance and death is probably the most extraordinary event. It has a number of resonances. It has that kind of question around the place of white Australians in the landscape. I think it raised really profound questions around: Did we really belong here? How do we fit in this strange place? How do we make our sense of home in this place?

It was something about the way that women were perceived. Everybody made judgments about Lindy Chamberlain, in much the way that people are still making judgments about people like Peta Credlin, because of the way she looked. They didn't hear much from her [Lindy] but there was certainly something about the way she looked, the way she spoke. She didn't cry when she was expected to cry.

PAUL BARCLAY: Interesting segue there.

MICHELLE ARROW: It just struck me. It's interesting about Peta Credlin, she's someone that we see but don't hear from much. I think people made a lot of judgments about her based on how she looked.

PAUL BARCLAY: It is quite possibly – I can be corrected on this – the best known miscarriage of justice perhaps in recent Australian history.

MICHELLE ARROW: Exactly. That's also what makes it so extraordinary. It made history in a number of ways. It was the first coronial inquest that was televised, the hearings were televised, because there was so much discussion and debate about what had happened. I think it was a particularly low moment in the tabloid media. If you've read Lindy's autobiography or have seen *Evil Angels*, you'll see the way that the media kind of deliberately misled and set things up.

It's also a defining moment in terms of the misuse of forensic science. It was that sense where Lindy Chamberlain had a number of eyewitnesses who could all corroborate her story and believed her, but it was totally overwhelmed by this forensic evidence and this kind of sense that they didn't want to believe Lindy was innocent because of the way she behaved but also because of this 'apparent' overwhelming forensic evidence that turned out to be completely flawed. It's one of those events that is a quite shameful moment in our past. I think a lot of people had that experience of feeling, 'Oh yes, she did it,' and then having to reconsider that. There are a lot of letters in the National Library of Australia where people wrote to Lindy Chamberlain and said, 'I thought you were guilty but now I realise I was wrong and I'm terribly sorry about that.' Again, it's one that comes up on the people's list, so again it's an event we all remember from the recent past.

PAUL BARCLAY: The secret ballot, Gideon, also makes it onto the list but perhaps what people don't fully understand is it's one of the relatively few defining moments on the list that had an international impact, didn't it?

GIDEON HAIGH: I think if you were to list the top five Australian innovations, the secret ballot would definitely have to be up there. It actually says that South Australia had the secret ballot; we had it first in Victoria.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Victoria had it first.

PAUL BARCLAY: One correction.

GIDEON HAIGH: A very interesting man created it, a fellow called Henry Samuel Chapman, who was a barrister and a bankrupt who was a friend of John Stuart Mill, founder of Montreal's first daily newspaper; compiler of Encyclopaedia Britannica's entry on wool and woollen manufacturers; and the Melbourne correspondent for *The Times* – fantastic.

MICHELLE ARROW: Renaissance man.

GIDEON HAIGH: It was interesting because there were slightly different models of the secret ballot in Victoria and South Australia. South Australia's was slightly more sophisticated because the ballot papers weren't numbered, so you couldn't actually go back and find who had made a particular vote. I was first woken to this when I read Catherine Helen Spence's autobiography a few years ago and she talked about going to the US for the first time in the 1890s. She said that her reception in reformist or radical circles was all about the ballot. People said to her, 'You come from Australia, the home of the secret ballot,' and she said, 'That was the greeting I often received and that was my passport to the heart of reformers all over America.'

I also found this fantastic novel, which was written in the early 1900s by a guy called Alfred Lewis, a book about Boss Tweed, the great impressario of Tammany Hall, because the Australian ballot, as it was called then, made it very difficult for party bosses, party machines, to influence voting as they had in the past. Boss Tweed is quoted in this novel as saying, 'Gad, we must invent a gun that shall knock through this Australian armour, we must really. A beastly system, I should call it, which those beggarly Australians have constructed. It's no wonder they're all convicts down there and it would need a felon to devise such an interference' – something we can all take pride in, the vexation of Americans like Boss Tweed.

PAUL BARCLAY: George, what about the moment we became a nation, Federation? You touch on this in your book. Is Federation a defining moment? Are some of the events leading up to Federation defining moments?

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: I think you have to take Federation as a defining moment. It's a question of what do you mean by what became of that first Federation parliament? It's on the list, the first significant piece of legislation – the first significant not the first piece of legislation – which was a declaration to the world of what this new nation of Australia stood for was the White Australia policy. In that White Australia policy and in those debates the first seven prime ministers of Australia all had a go.

If you ever have a spare few minutes on the Internet, get onto the Parliament House website and call up some of those debates and have a look at what [Edmund] Barton, [Alfred] Deakin, [George] Reid, [John] Watson, and [Andrew] Fisher and [William] Hughes and

[Joseph] Cook – have a look at what they all said about coloured people and how important it was for Australia to maintain its Britishness, to maintain social cohesion. But, of course, in the decade that followed, Australia was actually grumpier than it was when it was an open, globally connected settlement in the nineteenth century mixing English, British, Irish, Welsh, Chinese and Americans and French and Germans. It is a defining moment but these are the darkest chapters in our contemporary history. The absolute darkest chapters of our history are our settlement and the frontier war.

But of course the flip side of even the dispossession is very quickly a very prosperous and cohesive nation was created at the expense – so you are always going to have this particular dichotomy in Australia. I think White Australia is something we need to re-familiarise ourselves with – not because we are going to go down that road again but certain manifestations of White Australia you start to see again at the top of this particular boom with this urge to control, this urge to block the world off, this urge to issue demands to the rest of the world: we won't do anything on climate change until you do; we'll stop the boats; we won't take any refugees, although that position has changed, from Syria. That belligerent Australia you recognise in history as the Australia that is sitting on a pile of cash and doesn't want to share it with anyone else.

PAUL BARCLAY: Just on that, there is the 2001 *Tampa*, the Norwegian vessel which has rescued over 400 mostly Afghan asylum-seekers that is taken over by Australian troops. They want to go to Christmas Island so that they can make a claim. Prime Minister Howard says 'They're never going to land on Australian soil,' and they get pushed off to Nauru. It felt like a significant event at the time and still feels like a pretty significant event.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: It still is. You have to do the light and shade with these sorts of stories of course. You can't just look at that and start slashing your wrists and say, 'We're irredeemably racist.' John Howard discovered something really intriguing with the *Tampa*. Very soon after the *Tampa* he started to ramp up the immigration program. A lot of people that lived in electorates where they didn't have much contact with overseas-born Australians, who were still very, very anti-immigration, thought that because of the *Tampa* John Howard wasn't letting anybody in at all.

But it actually turned out that he had supersized the migration program and the people that started coming on John Howard's watch, and it's now continued over the last three prime ministers – we are now on the fourth since John Howard left – have pretty much let in numbers that even 20 and 30 years ago from China and from India would have been inconceivable. Could you imagine in 1988 and 1989 when John Howard first played the anti-Asian migration card that he would be the guy that essentially his co-legacy with Hawke and Keating is that there are half a million Chinese-born in Australia at the moment, 400,000 Indian-born in Australia and that people from Asia now outnumber people from Britain, Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa in Australia. We are fast becoming the world's first

genuine Eurasian nation – a high-income society to boot – and we're doing it with virtually nil disruption in the community.

PAUL BARCLAY: We are running out of time, but that brings us to China and I think you've looked through the list –

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Can't find the word.

PAUL BARCLAY: And you can find no mention of the word 'China' in the whole list.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: I would definitely junk free trade agreement and of course we'd also take Gideon's point that there's Victoria and South Australia in the secret ballot.

PAUL BARCLAY: I mean Whitlam went to China – is there a moment when we can say that Australia left behind its history for its geography in China?

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Actually thematically Whitlam went to China is probably not a bad one. It's a bit counter-intuitive because it gets it before Whitlam becomes prime minister but it's an opportunity to start the conversation.

MICHELLE ARROW: It's on the people's list.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: It would have to be on the people's list. The other thing, and we did allude to this earlier, is when Japan overtook Britain as our number one trading partner in the late 1960s. Of course China has now overtaken Japan. You might mechanically record the year, but the China boom began – in terms of when cash started raining on Australia – in about 2003 and 2004. But you might even think of something more symbolic such as when Hu Jintao addressed the Parliament. You might take something as simple as that. Who would have thought, even 20 years earlier, that the leader of Communist China would be getting a standing ovation from Australian politicians? This is a big thing; this is not a small thing. It is interesting that we still cling to some of these other things. Obviously we are now totally decoupled from the United States economically. So when they are recovering and China is having a bit of a slowdown, of course we are worse off – anyway.

PAUL BARCLAY: Jackie, is there an event in Australian Indigenous history, is there a moment, is there something that you feel particularly for you is a really ultra-defining moment? I was going to ask this question earlier about whether we know a defining moment when we see one. I felt like Mabo was that moment when we knew that the highest court in the land was prepared to say that there is a new form of land tenure in Australia and it is a form of tenure that acknowledges ongoing relationship to land. That felt like –

JACKIE HUGGINS: Yes, and it debunked the myth of *terra nullius* in this country that we were actually here. There were living people in Australia. It wasn't an empty land. Yes, I think that definitely changed the course of history. In my lifetime, I just think how

magnificent it’s been to see in the last 60 years the Apology, those walks, the 1967 referendum – magnificent moments for us that are defining moments. Mabo, if you look at it as a historical marker in this country, that would be it definitely for me.

PAUL BARCLAY: Michelle, you are writing a book on the 70s at the moment, I understand, researching that. Any moments from that gloriously multi-coloured era that we haven’t touched on that deserve mention?

MICHELLE ARROW: There are so many. Possibly the election of the Whitlam government could be one. It’s again not necessarily because it was – it was important but I think it kind of unleashed a whole lot of things that had been brewing for a while. You see in that three years of activity by the Whitlam government a whole bunch of stuff in relation to various social movements, which I think was long overdue.

GIDEON HAIGH: So did the ‘60s get to Australia in the ‘70s?

MICHELLE ARROW: I think they did. That’s my thesis perhaps, you know. That’s not an original – I didn’t come up with that. Certainly by the time you get to Whitlam, everyone is champing at the bit: Aboriginal rights, women’s rights, gay and lesbian activism and the push for migrants to actually feel more part of the national conversation. We have multiculturalism as a kind of policy objective, which is mostly implemented by the Fraser government and we have SBS as one of the moments on the list. Certainly the frenzied nature of that kind of period. But then of course there is the Dismissal, which is also on that list, which again I think is an event that people remember. The taxi driver who drove me here was telling me he was there that day. As a kind of significant moment in Australian political life and as the end of that dream, for a whole range of reasons I think it’s also significant.

PAUL BARCLAY: Yes, it was the moment at which many people thought there was the inexorable move towards Australia cutting the ties from England and becoming a republic.

GIDEON HAIGH: I was a primary school student and I remember we were lined up at afternoon play to go back in, to march into our classroom, and I can remember the headmaster coming out and telling us that the Whitlam government had been dismissed. I can remember not knowing exactly what that meant but knowing somehow it was important, that it was a defining moment. I thought: I must always remember where I am right now, because it might be useful if I am ever asked on a panel to talk about Australia’s defining moments.

PAUL BARCLAY: I remember no-one being able to sufficiently explain to me how it could happen actually. There were the dumb questions you ask when you were a kid like who’s able to sack the Prime Minister, which of course ended up being quite profound questions that constitutional lawyers argue about to this day.

We are in the middle of the centenary of the Great War at the moment and there is all manner of discussion about that and we've run quite a lot of it on *Big Ideas*, which is part of the reason I haven't brought it up now. But, Gideon, we are told that Australian national identity has been greatly forged by war by not just Gallipoli but by our participation in various wars.

GIDEON HAIGH: Certainly the trauma of war, the very heavy per capita casualties that Australia suffered. The long cycle of remembrance after it, in some respects this is a continuation of it. Australia really spent the next 20 years in mourning for what it's lost. Of course, the enormous potential of that generation that didn't have a chance to influence history, that didn't have a chance to participate in more constructive defining moments than sacrificing themselves for the greater good.

I must say I am not displeased that Australia's martial traditions aren't overestimated in this list. I sometimes think we make rather more of them than we need to. Someone was telling me last night that Australia has spent half a billion dollars on remembrance programs for the First World War. That seems to be getting things a little bit out of proportion.

MICHELLE ARROW: It's also vastly more than any other combatant nation in World War I.

GIDEON HAIGH: Yes, more than Britain.

MICHELLE ARROW: Much more. It's kind of extraordinary how much.

PAUL BARCLAY: That is the point at which we are going to finish our panel discussion but we do have, as I mentioned, some time for questions and comments from the audience. Of course, it's been a ridiculously simplistic journey through Australian history that we've had but it's been a bit of fun. Don't give us your righteous indignation about what we didn't talk about because we all know – and I have a list of it here that I didn't have time to get to. It would be great to hear from you about questions and comments. We have a gentleman in the middle who has put his hand up very quickly. We have 15 minutes or so.

QUESTION: David Stevens from Honest History website. At the other end of the lake there's an institution, the War Memorial, which slogan is: 'Every nation has its story. This is our story,' the story that the memorial tells. Do you think that slogan and the defining moments concept can ever be reconciled or does it sort of run its own race forever and a day?

PAUL BARCLAY: Who wants to go?

MICHELLE ARROW: Clearly it's the War Memorial. That is the story that that museum was originally set up to tell. I think it's lovely that the National Museum is running a slightly parallel track which I think is much more inclusive and open. But that said, a lot of people do draw immense interest in military history because it's actually family history. We maybe

sometimes misread some of the commemoration – obviously the federal government is spending a lot of money on it this year. But I think a lot of what appeals to people in military history is those personal connections. So I think perhaps we shouldn't necessarily read them as in opposition to one another. I love the democratising impulse of this project.

PAUL BARCLAY: Interestingly, Jackie, Brendan Nelson has declined to include the frontier wars, a representation of them in his institution. Henry Reynolds and many others have been applying some pressure on him to do so.

JACKIE HUGGINS: Yes. I think Brendan's preference is that they come here to the National Museum, which is food for thought.

It's interesting because my grandfather fought in Belgium in World War I and he was injured. He came home. And my father was a prisoner of war in World War II at the Burma Thailand railway. He lived until the age of 37 and passed away from the post-traumatic stress kind of thing. It is about the stories; it is about the military history. Every Indigenous person in this country would have an ancestor who went to war, sometimes when we weren't even citizens of our own country. It is something we have to kind of recognise ourselves.

MICHELLE ARROW: I wasn't thinking of it as separate – Indigenous history is totally intertwined with our military history.

JACKIE HUGGINS: Yes, right through.

PAUL BARCLAY: Let's keep racing through.

QUESTION: One observation: when you look at the people's list, there seems to be more social defining moments than traditional history moments, which I think is very interesting. You seem to spend more time talking about things on the people's list than the other list. But I wanted to ask: if you could create a future defining moment for Australia, what would it be?

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: In a word – republic – because it's going to happen eventually.

MICHELLE ARROW: Treaty –

GIDEON HAIGH: I could only think of Cathy Freeman riding Phar Lap along the shores of Gallipoli, throwing a ball to Donald Bradman and Shane Warne defending –

MICHELLE ARROW: Just to bring it all together.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: Some new beer being invented or something.

PAUL BARCLAY: Maybe that's a challenge for the Museum. Maybe we could have a competition there in that very question.

QUESTION: May I say there are some fine rural defining moments – we can talk about rabbits, the introduction of same, we can talk about the hero Frank Fenner and myxomatosis. We can talk about bush flies and Doug Waterhouse, another Canberra hero. We can think about the '51 wool boom, 150 million sheep we had. That was such a strong part of our whole economy. And then after the Korean War, which of course assisted the wool boom, the introduction of synthetic clothing and what an impact that had on rural industries. The panel might like to discuss the freedoms that we've had perhaps – or the wins – such as the cessation of London funds and the introduction of the High Court?

PAUL BARCLAY: Well there's a raft of very good points that you've made there. Gideon, were you going to comment?

GIDEON HAIGH: I was going to say that I did think that wool was under-represented in our list, partly because it was everyone's perception of Australia that we were the wool country. If they knew anything about Australia at all, it was that it was full of sheep. Perhaps overall our defining moments haven't given enough consideration to how we've been perceived externally.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: That was actually my point about the 1840s, because what was the income stream that was bringing the migrants? The colonies went from a fraction of Britain's wool supply to majority supplier by the end of the 1840s. We replaced Germany as the number one supplier of wool to Britain. That story is a rural story but it's also part of the Industrial Revolution and our part in a global system.

MICHELLE ARROW: It also perhaps relates to – there aren't that many milestones or moments here around mining. It's probably a list that's very much – it's like any history, it's always written from the present perspective. We are today a very highly urban society so I think we do tend to downplay the importance of the rural and the regional in these kinds of lists too.

GIDEON HAIGH: One thing I actually wanted to get in the list was the introduction of the dung beetle to Australia in the late 1960s by the CSIRO to counteract the bush flies which were in plague proportions because cattle were an introduced species to Australia. I don't know whether it's just an impression that I had, but when I was a kid I remember there being lots and lots of flies in Australia. There don't seem to be anywhere nearly so many flies now, which of course has conduced to us leading a much more pleasant outdoor lifestyle. When we get the opportunity to sit in our café dining al fresco you kind of think maybe 30 years ago that wouldn't have been possible. Maybe that's an impression that I got.

PAUL BARCLAY: The ore deposits too we didn't talk about in the 1880s, which was a pretty big deal.

QUESTION: I want to talk about the coaxial cable and how we were so isolated before that went down. Now I am regretting it, especially since I saw the towers coming down and Sandra Sully right on the spot before even the New Yorkers knew what was happening. I think that was a big time as well – plus altruism and volunteering with the surf lifesavers, the Flying Doctor Service, teaching English to migrants. There is still a lot of isolation which volunteers overcome.

PAUL BARCLAY: The twin towers moment really wasn't our moment as Australians – like exclusively – but it was a moment. I was doing one of these events actually in Townsville that night, and we all retired back to the bar and the casino. The rest of the gang stayed up and saw it all unfold live. I went to bed and remember getting a phone call telling me to get up and watch it. It was, as you say, the coaxial cable bringing you that horrific event and interrupting your life. We haven't spoken a lot about science and technology either.

MICHELLE ARROW: The Internet, I think, appears on here, and again that reminds me, too, of the decreasing isolation, of the globalisation. Gideon, you touched on this, these are very much about how the nation is perceived from without. These are very much a national list. I think things like globalisation, the coaxial cable – all those things are bringing the world closer together.

GIDEON HAIGH: The introduction of a telegraphic cable from the UK in the 1870s is a phenomenal shrinking of time and space. Recently I have been looking at reporting of cricket from overseas. It fascinated me that Australian papers were actually able to carry scores of that amazing game where the Australians beat MCC at Lords in 1878 virtually 12 hours after it happened. They could only get in two paragraphs, but what an amazing two paragraphs it was. 'The Australians have bowled out the MCC for 33 and 19 and beaten them in a day.' Can you imagine what it must have been like to pick up a copy of the *Argus* and read that? There would have been a sense of complete disbelief about this. That was something that had only really been possible for the preceding three or four years.

Then there's the opposite case where England coming out here for the first five test series in 1894–95, they begin to publish full-scale reports of that series in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, very expensive expedient because the cost per word was so high. But it meant that suddenly you could follow sport almost in real time on both sides of the world. It was alleged that Queen Victoria followed that series really closely, that the stock exchanges closed. Because cricket is the first kind of national game in both these countries, it has tremendous traction which in some respects it has never really lost.

PAUL BARCLAY: Colour TV became important with sport too, didn't it, because all of a sudden you could see cricket in its full glory – and football for that matter too, actually.

GIDEON HAIGH: Yes, and of course Kerry Packer takes advantage of that by bringing colour to cricket to meet television half way. If there was probably another sporting incident

that I would have included on the list of 100, it would have been that fabled game at the SCG on 27 November 1978 where World Series cricket comes to the SCG and kind of crashes the Establishment's party and in a sense becomes the new establishment going forward.

PAUL BARCLAY: I reckon we have time for one more question. I've no idea who to pick.

QUESTION: My name is Laura and I'm a recent science graduate from the Australian National University and I'm too young to remember the vast majority of events on that list. There is a lot of them like the Chamberlain case and the 1967 referendum that bring up emotions for me and that in some way I do remember. I wanted to ask you guys: In making that list, how does that collective social memory play a role in making a defining moment?

MICHELLE ARROW: That's an excellent question.

GIDEON HAIGH: That's a very good question.

PAUL BARCLAY: It's really about memory.

GEORGE MEGALOGENIS: But some of the memory you're describing is a repetition, it's the replay.

MICHELLE ARROW: Yes. And also, interestingly enough, we talked about in some ways there are certain decades that aren't represented, and they are mostly well out of the realm of living memory. It's interesting looking at the people's list, there are a lot of events within living memory too and things that are important not necessarily because they were – things like the America's Cup. I remember that. I wouldn't necessarily call it a defining moment if I was going to be objective about the history of the nation but I remember getting up and watching it with my Dad and being incredibly excited and everyone was at school talking about it.

I think there's a really interesting interplay between public and private memory going on here. These are inevitably produced both by official imperatives – the sort of sense of what is objectively important – and by what is remembered. In 20 years' time I suspect some of those events won't appear. I think something like flight MH17 being shot down over the Ukraine, clearly that's an important global media event. Will we think it's a defining moment for Australia in ten years' time? Maybe not.

PAUL BARCLAY: Before I hand back to Janda to formally close tonight's proceedings, I want to remind you there will be future events presented by RN and the Museum. I will be moderating them. We'll be taking some of the moments that we've spoken about tonight and drilling down in far greater detail around some of them – yet to be decided – where we really pull apart some of these moments in detail.

Dr JANDA GOODING: Thanks, Paul. Thank you everyone for coming tonight. I thank our panellists. It's been an absolutely fascinating discussion. As Paul says, watch our website. We have more of these panel discussions coming up next year. The date for the discussion around *Encounters*, which is our very important Indigenous exhibition that opens on 27 November, the date for that *Big Ideas* discussion here is 1 December. Let's all thank the panel for tonight. [applause]