



CURTIN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Beginnings: images of occupied Japan

Speech given by Sallybeth Bumbrey, US Consul-General at the launch of exhibition *Beginnings: [images of occupied Japan](#)* on 4 October 1999.

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It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to open this exhibition from the MacArthur Memorial Library entitled *Beginnings: Images of Occupied Japan*. Recently I was asked if I knew anything about Japan. I replied that although I had never visited the country, I had been asked to participate in this opening in order to share my thoughts on cultural relations between the United States and Australia.

I hope that you will bear with me because, even after one year in Australia, I am attempting this as a relative novice, since my Foreign Service experience has been almost exclusively in Africa and the Middle East. And, I have never worked as a cultural affairs officer.

As I considered the direction of my thoughts, I followed what I assume is a fairly standard practice of searching for a joke or an appropriate quotation with which to launch my presentation. I considered, rejected, and yet remained fascinated by the late Australian artist Sir Robert Murray Helpmann's "I don't despair about the cultural scene in Australia because there isn't one here to despair about."

When I ran this quotation by members of my Australian staff they agreed that there wasn't any culture in "those days." In fact, until the 1960s Washington, DC was considered by many to be an unsophisticated cultural backwater. It took the stylish Kennedy Administration to develop in many Americans a previously unrecognized desire for cultural pursuits.

Australia and the United States are both young countries that some may accuse of lacking culture in the classical sense. Over the years, however, I have come to believe that every country has a unique culture based upon its art, dance, social and religious traditions, music, as well as special family relationships or ages-old tribal responsibilities. In that sense both Australia and the United States are privileged to have indigenous peoples and cultures whose place and traditions in their respective countries deserve to be acknowledged and celebrated.

Speaking as someone who has lived in a number of fascinating countries, I can confirm that an outsider often faces the difficult task of trying to penetrate another culture and learn from other traditions. I also know from personal experience that crossing cultural boundaries isn't always comfortable.

However, more often than not, a person who is strongly motivated, keenly interested, and most importantly blessed with an open mind can learn to appreciate and understand diverse differences of tradition and custom.

Which leads me to Professor Louis Menand of the City University of New York who was quoted in the New Yorker Magazine as saying "culture isn't something that comes with one's race or sex. It comes only through experience; there isn't any other way to acquire it. And in the end, everyone's culture is different, because everyone's experience is different." I wonder then, if we are all the sum total of our different experiences, at what point do these disparate experiences intersect and coalesce into the concept of an international culture?

A global culture is often defined by the standards of popular, or what some would call "American" culture. This morning I will neither defend nor apologize for what some social commentators believe is an effort to Americanize Australia, and the rest of the world. It is undeniable that the United States has managed to spread everything from fashion and fast food to hip-hop music throughout the world. At the same time, it should also be recognized that the United States has likewise absorbed diverse cultures and traditions leading many people today to question who or what is a "real American".

Several days ago I had the opportunity to ask some Australian acquaintances their views on the degree of “Americanization” in Australia. That question initiated an animated discussion during which they suggested that, relative to the number of Americans living in Australia, American influence far surpasses that of the Irish or English or other immigrant groups in this country. The reasons they offered varied from the description of American culture as fun and uplifting, to acknowledging the reality of an economic superpower that mass produces and markets its culture worldwide.

For the sake of being provocative, I wonder if Australia’s perceived susceptibility to American culture may be the result of an Australian identity conflict, that will only be resolved as Australians define themselves and their country? The debate continues, however, on how to define the new Australian identity, and on how it will continue to evolve.

In order to explain the ties that bind Australians and Americans we have to view our relationship within a context of over two hundred years of association. The earliest evidence of contact between the United States and Australia was recorded in 1792, when two whaling vessels from Nantucket, Massachusetts anchored in Shark Bay.

Therefore, from the days when whaling ships sailed from the port of New Bedford, Massachusetts, which was my mother’s home, and the arrival of the Great White Fleet in 1907, to the defining events of World War II, the Australian and American partnership has strengthened into a permanent relationship, a strategic alliance, and on a people to people basis, a strong friendship based upon mutual admiration, respect, and understanding. In the words of the American Ambassador, Genta Hawkins Holmes, “we have no more reliable ally than Australia. We have no ally who understands us better; none who puts up with our shortcomings better.”

Given our shared history of English pioneer settlement, a common language and respect for the work ethic, it is not surprising that information, culture, and expertise flow in both directions. Talented Australians have been lured to the United States and are prominent in the field of sports, the entertainment industry, academia, and even at high levels within the U.S. government.

Americans are fascinated by Australia, and although American tourism to Australia may trail that of visitors from Asia and Europe, I have noticed that Australia is the subject of a fair number of documentaries shown on American television. Also, one Saturday morning last month when I was in Washington, I watched a bit of an American children's show whose project for the program focussed on exposing their young viewers to Australian Aboriginal art through simplified arts and crafts projects.

It follows then that the popularity and acceptance of American-inspired music, dance, television programs and movie themes are only the most recent additions to a long history of merchant, naval, military, political, and economic links between Australia and the United States.

While fashion and music fads may wax and wane, the globalization of business and political culture is destined to become permanent. There is no turning back from the obligations and responsibilities that are the result of globalization and interdependence. As demonstrated by this exhibition, out of the devastation of World War II the Allied Forces under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, and the Japanese people together embarked on a journey that would transform Japan from a demoralized and devastated nation into a free, open, and democratic society.

General MacArthur, who died in 1964, has been described as the most dynamic American military speaker in the 20th century. In his farewell address to the American Congress on April 19, 1951 General MacArthur said:

' The Japanese people since the war have undergone the greatest reformation recorded in modern history with a commendable will, eagerness to learn, and marked capacity to understand, they have, from the ashes left in war's wake, erected in Japan an edifice dedicated to the primacy of individual liberty and personal dignity, and in the ensuing process there has been created a truly representative government committed to the advance of political morality, freedom of economic enterprise, and social justice.'

In his photographic exhibition *Beginnings: Images of Occupied Japan*, American photographer Nicholas Orzio has documented the destruction and desolation of a war that followed World War I, which was also known as the Great War, and was to have been the war to end all wars.

With each successive war we relive history, and rather than wars becoming less common, regional conflicts, often based upon generations old ethnic or religious hatreds, continue to plague many parts of the world. As we are being propelled into the 21st century, with several countries holding weapons of mass destruction, the thought of a war to end all wars is an enormously frightening prospect.

Curtin University through making this exhibition available in the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, is creating the opportunity for a generation of young Australians and their cohorts from other parts of the world to contemplate the horrors of war. The striking visual images from this exhibition must be a cautionary lesson to the many students who, as the 21st century progresses, may one day confront momentous decisions as political leaders or front line military commanders in their own countries.

I congratulate Curtin University for its wisdom, generosity, and foresight in sponsoring this exhibition. Because today, in an era of cost cutting and redirecting of priorities, United States government financial support for travelling art exhibits and artists is not as widespread as it was in the not so distant past.

Gone are the glamorous days when artists of the stature of Duke Ellington, or the Alvin Ailey Dance Company toured the world under the auspices of the United States Information Agency bringing the joy and exuberance of contemporary American culture to enthusiastic and receptive audiences. I never had the opportunity to experience the big name entertainers who once travelled the globe, but I have enjoyed regional and indigenous Americana as presented by travelling groups as diverse as Native American tribal dancers, clog dancers from South Carolina, country and western artists, and jazz musicians from New Orleans.

For a moment I would like to revisit Louis Menand's observations about differing cultural and life experiences. I noticed in the Congo how an audience could become captivated by performances that, superficially at least, would not seem to be a source of inspiration to them.

For example, in Kinshasa I realized during a performance by a Native American group that the Congolese were really entranced by the spectacle. The feathered head dresses, colour, drums, hypnotic rhythms, and chants all resonated with an African audience. Likewise and perhaps more unusual, the staging of a Chinese ballet in Kinshasa brought nods of appreciation and recognition as the audience experienced with the actors an intriguing drama of life, love, betrayal, and death. While everyone's cultural frame of reference and life experiences were certainly different, on a profoundly human level they all connected across racial, ethnic, language, and yes cultural boundaries.

In addition to the cultural awareness that is often the result of artistic performances, students of American culture were once able to cross boundaries through the books and research materials that were available in United States Information Service Libraries. Resource Centers have turned libraries into the relics of the information superhighway. I would like to acknowledge here our gratitude to Curtin University for enabling the Foreign Student Advisors' work to continue by offering them a home on this lovely campus when the United States Information Service closed its offices in Perth several years ago.

Even though our cultural affairs programs may have shifted focus, the cultural and educational bonds between the United States and Australia have not suffered. The linkages continue to exist through Curtin University of Technology and the other universities in Western Australia through faculty and student exchange programs with American institutions of higher learning.

In addition, the United States Information Agency continues to encourage American studies programs through the distribution of materials for classroom use, and the organization of seminars for secondary school teachers. In Perth we also have reason to be encouraged because the American Embassy in Canberra is actively looking at

opportunities to include Western Australia on speakers' programs, as well as involve Perth in digital video teleconferencing events.

Today, perhaps the most important element in our range of bilateral cultural exchange programs is conducted through the Australian-American Educational Foundation (AAEF) or the Fulbright Program. The program, which is currently active in over 140 countries, is named for the late American Senator J. William Fulbright. A former Rhodes scholar, Senator Fulbright served as chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations from 1959 until he retired from Congress in 1974.

On November 26th of this year the Fulbright Program will observe its 50th anniversary in Australia. The event will be celebrated in Sydney on November 8th with a gala dinner, which Mrs Fulbright will attend. During the past half-century over 4200 Australians and Americans representing various academic, professional, and artistic specialties have participated in the program.

There is a large network of distinguished former Fulbrighters in Western Australia. I hope that I will not offend any Fulbrighters in the audience if I cite only a handful of prominent Fulbright recipients: they are Mr. W. Harold Clough who, having received a grant in 1951 was an early participant in the program, and Sir Ronald Wilson followed a Fulbright program in 1956. Among the more recent Fulbrighters there is Ms Elizabeth Churcher, who was the Director of the WA Art Gallery (1988), as well as author and artist Sally Morgan (1990).

As I reviewed the 1998 Fulbright Annual Report I noticed the remarks that distinguished American diplomat Ambassador Thomas Pickering made during an address before the Fulbright Alumni Association in Washington, DC. Ambassador Pickering, who is the Under-secretary of State for Political Affairs, said:

' As a former Fulbright Scholar, I remain grateful for what was in essence my first diplomatic assignment. It was a period of deep and intensive exposure to an almost foreign land Australia. In each of my assignments I have worked with ministers, businessmen, teachers, and diplomats who got to know Australia as Fulbrighters. This contribution is real and enduring.'

In addition to the Fulbright Program, the United States government also places an important emphasis on the selection process for the International Visitor Program and the Voluntary Visitor Program. These programs seek to identify prominent personalities, or those who are destined to rise to positions of power and influence, and expose them to a one-month professional program in the United States.

Among the current Federal ministers who have been the recipients of International Visitor grants I will name only a few: there is Foreign Minister Alexander Downer (1993), Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party John Anderson and the Minister for Industry, Science and Resources Nick Minchin (1992), Treasurer Peter Costello (1991), and Minister for Immigration and Multi-Cultural Affairs Philip Ruddock and the Minister for Defence John Moore (1977). International Visitor grantees from Western Australia include Senator Peter Cook (1977), and the Honourable Colin Barnett, Minister for Resources Development, Energy, Education, as well as the Honourable Tom Stephens, Opposition Member for Mining and Pastoral Region.

In addition, I note that Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser travelled to the United States in 1964, and Paul Keating was an international visitor in 1971. Finally, I would like to recognize Dr Jeanne Roberts, of the Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies, who has been selected by the United States Information Service to be a Scholar-In-Residence and teach Australian Aboriginal Studies at Elon college in the state of North Carolina.

Against the backdrop of global cultural interactions I have attempted to discuss the Australian and American relationship within the context of a long-term mutually enriching and beneficial partnership. I believe that cultural exchanges are positive global phenomena that all countries should embrace, not blindly but selectively. A good example is the Australian approach of searching for an Australian Model, especially as it applies to the Republic debate and the framing of the questions on the referendum ballot. This is indicative of a mature and independent country that realizes the "American" way may not necessarily fit the dreams, aspirations, and cultural identity of the Australian people.

Cultural exchanges such as this exhibition present opportunities for cross-generational analysis of events that turned the tide of history more than half a century ago. As we begin the next century, the lessons from Beginnings: Images of Occupied Japan are three fold. First, this exhibition certainly shows us that reconstruction and modernization arose from the ashes of war; and secondly, we are reminded that the war time era produced great leaders such as Prime Minister John Curtin and General Douglas MacArthur. But thirdly, I also hope that visitors to the exhibition will take away another message, and that is the individual images of determination and visions of hope for a nation and people who were looking towards new beginnings.

It is now my great honour to declare open Beginnings: Images of Occupied Japan.

Thank you very much.