



1770 And All That – Why Renaming Cook Cup Is Wrong

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The Rugby Football Union and Rugby Australia's joint decision this month to rename the Cook Cup the Ella-Mobbs Trophy is not only pointless virtue signalling but also a gross misrepresentation of one of the most remarkable figures in our recent history.

In the past few years James Cook has gone from being revered as a courageous hero to being vilified as a racist coloniser who represented British imperialism and genocide. Statues depicting him have been attacked, to the point where the monument in Sydney's Hyde Park had to be protected by police during Black Lives Matter protests in 2020.

Cook was no racist. He did not colonise Australia. He was not even an advocate of colonisation. During his second voyage he was thinking about the impact of European expansion on native societies: "We introduce among them wants and perhaps diseases which they never before knew, and which serves only to disturb that happy tranquillity they and their forefathers had enjoy'd. If anyone denies the truth of this assertion, let him tell me what the Natives of the whole extent of America have gained by the commerce they have had with Europeans."



What is more, by the time that the First Fleet landed in 1788, Cook had been dead nine years.

None of this matters to the woke sporting elite of Rugby Australia, who are determined to use Cook to show how virtuous they are. It is easy to portray Cook as a monster because it seems many Australians are not familiar with who Cook was or what he achieved. It is easy to distort history when the facts are no longer taught.

A poll conducted in 2019 by the Department of Communication and the Arts found 47 per cent of Australians thought the HMS Endeavour arrived in Australia with the First Fleet in 1788, while 31 per cent thought Cook was the first European to find Australia.

The reason Australians are hazy on the facts is because we are being failed by our education system. In the forthcoming approved version of the national curriculum, primary school boys and girls will learn nothing of Cook or the First Fleet until year 4. Children are taught when to use a welcome to country before they hear about Cook or the First Fleet. There are more references to NAIDOC Week than Cook in humanities and social sciences (F-6). In secondary school history Cook is briefly mentioned in year 9, while there is a passing reference made to the First Fleet in year 10. At this rate, by the time they leave school Australians will have forgotten Cook altogether.

Worryingly, the dearth of knowledge about this country's history is also evident among our politicians who are paid by Australians to represent them and to make decisions about the direction in which this country is going.

When senator Bridget McKenzie made the case for celebrating Australia Day on January 26 to Sky News, she too seemed to think Cook sailed with the First Fleet, saying: "That is when the course of our nation changed forever. When Captain Cook stepped ashore."

Senator Sarah Hanson-Young also made an embarrassing blunder in a press release by conflating the events of 1770 and 1788. "Despite an important national debate about changing the date of Australia Day away from Captain Cook's landing at Botany Bay," she said, "the government has decided to spend taxpayer money it is stripping from the ABC on yet another monument to Captain Cook on the land of the Dharawal people."

Even Mark Ella said while it meant a lot to him and his family, he "didn't really give an opinion (on the idea of changing the name)", although he understood the "connotations (around the Cook Cup) and it certainly didn't upset me".

Rugby Australia is wrong to play this game of woke. Its business should be to focus on its fans, who watch the game as a release from politics, not to have it thrown in their faces.

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