



The White Queen: One Nation and the Politics of Race

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In this timely Quarterly Essay, David Marr looks at Australia's brand of the politics of resentment now sweeping the world.

Pauline Hanson is not alone out there. A million votes are in play. Strategists in both Labor and the Coalition are asking, what can we give them? At stake are the progressive hopes of most Australians, hopes held hostage more than ever to the fears – especially the race fears – of old Australia.

This is a riveting essay by one of Australia's best writers, examining the peculiar power of the fearful in this confident and prosperous nation.

The White Queen: One Nation and the Politics of Race Details

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PattyMacDotComma says

5★

Pauline Hanson is such an easy target – a shrill, voluptuous redhead with extremist fringe ideas who attracts others with views outside of mainstream politics. But David Marr goes to the trouble to not take cheap shots but to have a good look at what she thinks she stands for, what her followers think she stands for, and what other voters think she stands for.

Almost twenty years ago, she came into federal parliament as a Queensland senator fighting against Aboriginal land rights and Australia being swamped with Asians.

John Howard was Prime Minister and didn't like her politics but didn't stand up to her. Marr quotes Howard's own memoir Lazarus Rising as saying there was no point in attacking.

“A more vigorous response from me would have intensified the frustrations felt by those Australians to whom she gave a voice, and gratuitously alienated them from me – and for what purpose, other than the political benefit of the ALP?”

To which Marr says:

“Something grubby entered national life at this point. Once again, when it really mattered, Howard showed himself unable to rise above politics. Instead of taking her on in the name of decent Australia, he put the race vote in play in Canberra. What mattered for him was the arithmetic winning back those lost votes at the fringe. He believed she would soon fizzle out. . .”

As Hanson said, **“Howard was smart. He gauged the support I had from the public and, when the time was right, implemented them as liberal policy.”**

Howard slashed Indigenous funding, immigration numbers, family reunion visas, migrant welfare, among other measures, to keep her followers in the fold.

Twenty years later, after 11 weeks in prison (overturned sentence) and almost annual unsuccessful tilts at seats in various governments, she's baaaack, and this time she's after Muslims. Marr has a lot of statistics and charts and information to show where her supporters come from, what their issues are, and whether or not they are a cohesive bunch.

In reverse order, I'll say no, they are not a cohesive bunch. And they're not necessarily aligned with Trump supporters or Brexit either. And they're not all from the bush, but the majority are older people. She has attracted some far right white supremacists and crackpots, but many of her people don't give a hoot about marriage equality or other far-right issues. They're with her because of race.

She's pragmatic, so if a follower or party member, does something she doesn't like, they're out. Get out of the way, and let me run things. Loyalty for many years doesn't seem to count for much. And she's been known to say (I saw her do it) one thing on one side of the country and the opposite on the other, thinking perhaps that what she says campaigning in Western Australia isn't going to be heard all the way back home

in Queensland but it was. (She'd told W.A. voters she was happy to support Queensland losing part of their share of the GST so it could go to W.A. – Oops!)

She's not right, she's not left, she's just really Out There and she appeals to people who don't like business as usual politics. She's got people who think Climate Change is a hoax, dreamed up by the UN so they can take over the world . . . but I won't go on.

Muslim Labor Senator Dr Anne Aly, an authority on radicalisation, had lunch with Hanson, who said **“you're not a real Muslim because you aren't advocating to throw people off buildings or behead people.”**

Aly couldn't convince her that most Muslims are like her, not like the fanatics. But Aly agrees that Hanson thinks she's on a winner with this attitude so isn't going to change it.

“She has called for all Muslim immigration and all refugee programs to end. She demanded a royal commission to investigate the true nature of Islam: religion or ideology of hate?”

Good luck with that. There's more about Muslims in the essay and more about Hanson's policies, and I use the word loosely. There's also the history of Tony Abbott funding the case against her that put her in prison.

But the upshot is, as Aly says **“If Trump is ‘Make America Great Again’, Pauline is ‘Keep Australia Anxious.’”**

I may be anxious, but it's about her and her lack of understanding of the basic principles of civilisation that I worry, not about the whichever-colour/religion/nationality hordes I'm about to be overrun by.

I've always said we'll be better off when we're all coffee-coloured. She tried migrating to England until she got there and decided the population was entirely too colourful for her to feel safe. Maybe we could just give her her own island. :) If only.

Thanks to David Marr for a great read.

Annie says

One woman's ambition of dividing Australia on the basis of race and how it got its current foothold in Australia. How John Howard, the ultimate politician, played the game of numbers and gave One Nation its first lease of life for the minority votes.

One Nation wants the Australia of a few decades back, an Australia with white Christian immigrants. But that age is gone. Technology is putting the world on fast forward. Only change is constant and there is no going back.

Hope Australia will get some strong leaders with unshakable principles who has the best interests of all Australians at heart.

Update after reading the correspondence - There has been a shift to ppl voting for minorities in the last few elections indicating that people are not happy with the current options of labor or liberal. One Nation has benefited from this shift

Ross McDougall says

Well-written analysis into the Hanson element that has been around Australian politics. Marr certainly pulls no punches in his distaste for Hanson, but a lot of it is backed up by data and comments from others.

While the essay doesn't offer any potential responses to race politics and Hanson herself (a tall order), it is encouraging to know that the coverage that is afforded to One Nation and their bedfellows is out of whack with the opinions and perspectives of the majority of Australians. Good reading to put perspective and context around current politics.

Jrbsays says

David Marr's essay draws on research and historical evidence to show just how few Australians actually fall for Hansen's incoherent, irrational bile laden rhetoric.

I found it extremely comforting to be reassured that my love of Australia as a welcoming place if 'the fair go' is not dead - despite what popular media may try to have us believe.

Keep calm, sit back and wait for One Nation to implode once more methinks.

Thank you David.

Timothy Dymond says

David Marr's Quarterly Essay could be read as a sequel to the previous Essay by Stan Grant 'The Australian Dream'. Grant stated bluntly that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Australian Dream 'is rooted in racism'. Marr describes how Pauline Hanson's voters, drawn to her by racism, dream of returning to an old version of Australia that hasn't existed since their parents were children - and probably didn't really exist even then.

Marr uses data from the Australian Electoral Survey (AES) to establish that Hanson's voters (around a million people nation wide), are not the 'white working class' or the wretched of the Earth. They are more likely to be relatively prosperous people. Hanson herself was a very successful small businesswoman who, despite the 'humble fish and chip shop' owner image she likes to project, didn't actually have to work in her own shop, sent her children to private school, and could raise horses on the property she owned out of town.

Marr uses the AES data to establish that racism, and a racist infused nostalgia, are primarily what draws Hanson's supporters to her. He's been criticised for stating the bleeding obvious - however if you consider the way Hanson is treated in mainstream politics at the moment it is far from obvious that her racism, and those of her supporters, is being called to account. The major political parties very carefully try NOT to call Hanson a racist least her voters ('up for grabs' in electoral calculations) be offended. There is also a strand of materialist Left analysis that wants to see Hanson voters as victims of globalisation, thus downplaying the 'idealist' explanation that they vote their racism: Hansonite racism acts against the Hansonite's direct

material self-interests - as the older version of White Australia that they cherish would also be a poorer one for them personally. Conservatives want to see Hansonites as victims of 'political correctness gone mad' who are striking back - precipitating a crisis of conservatism in Australia and putting the future of Liberal Party in doubt. However it is hard to argue that you are repressed if you can elect Hanson and her One Nation cohorts to state and national parliaments. Marr disputes the idea that Hanson is the local representative any global wave of populist sentiment of the likes of Trump and Brexit. As a populist, Hanson has never been that popular at the ballot box. Her greatest power is to act as a malign gravitational force in politics. The Australian political system is designed so that relatively small groups of voters who might 'swing' have powerful leverage as the major parties shape their policies to attract them. E.g. Hanson did not invent Australia's hostility to 'boat people' - the majors can claim credit for that - but her presence on the political scene was a powerful accelerant for the worst of those policies. This was especially the case with a PM such as John Howard, whose political views were not so different from Hanson's, but were more subtly expressed.

Marr's essay is very much a real time reportage of an unfolding situation. The biggest test of Hansonism is yet to come with the Queensland state election - so future events might throw out the above analysis. However it is hard to escape Marr's conclusion that there is no other way to confront Hansonism than by confronting her racism, and to tell her supporters that their dream of an old Australia is an impossible one.

Caitlin says

Quarterly Essays are always a bit of a lucky dip. Some editions feel like stretched out magazine articles, others feel like cut down first drafts of longer form books (which many end up being).

The interesting thing about this book is what isn't in it. So much has been said, and said, and said again about Hanson - so it was going to be interesting to see what there is left to be said about her and her party in its various incarnations. Just as the subject is a predictable attention-grabber, David Marr himself always engages himself passionately - often coming out with loud pronouncements even on relatively benign subjects and in reserved forums (whenever Marr and Gerard Henderson are on the same panel of Insiders I grab the popcorn.)

So this book is almost disappointingly "straight" in its telling of Hanson's path to parliament in the 90s, her more recent triumphant return and the odd time in between - but for someone as passionate and as passionately opposed to many of the things Hanson and her party campaign for, Marr has been unbelievably reserved in his narration. There really isn't too much elaboration or deep interpretation, which I feel would mean that an ardent Hanson supporter would find it difficult to pinpoint anything Marr wrote that was defamatory. With all the noise and reaction against Hanson, it's almost refreshing to read an account of her rise without being an apology for the views she espouses.

I will come back to review this after the next edition - where correspondence containing reflections, rebuttals, refutations and updates are included.

Andrew Saul says

Excellent essay by Marr. Up there with his one on Abbott. He traces Hanson and her voters over the years to

explain who they are, where they have come from and who they are now. It's important to understand this section of Australia as even though, thankfully, it's not a large part of Australia given the marginal nature of much of Australian politics they can hold significant power over some issues.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

'I'm back! One Nation and the politics of race.'

This essay by David Marr is well worth reading, especially by those of us puzzled by the impact of the Hanson phenomenon. Who'd have thought, after Pauline Hanson's brief period in the Australian Parliament as the member for Oxley between 1996 and 1998, that she'd be elected as a Senator in 2016, together with three other members of the Pauline Hanson One Nation party? And who'd have thought that the state of the Australian Parliament is such that Senator Hanson would have such influence in Australian politics?

Who are Pauline Hanson's supporters, and why do they support her? Please explain.

In this essay, David Marr sets out to explain some of the mysteries, some of the appeal of the Hanson phenomenon. Her supporters are overwhelmingly white and Australian born. They are also people who, while they left school early, have largely been successful. They are not poor. Generally, they want a return to a distantly remembered Australia, one in which Australian industries were protected by tariffs, one in which they felt safe, secure and part of a majority.

How much support does Pauline Hanson actually have, and does it matter? While Pauline Hanson's following may be comparatively small, it matters. It matters because neither of the major parties in Australian politics have had the courage to tackle Pauline Hanson over some of her more outrageous claims. It matters because not challenging some of Pauline Hanson's claims and assertions sounds and feels like the major parties agree with them. It matters because many of those views are racist and are divisive.

Since this essay was published, we've had the unedifying spectacle of Senator Hanson wearing a burqua into the Australian Senate as part of her move to 'ban the burqua'. While this was broadly condemned, she also had plenty of support across Australia.

The Hanson phenomenon will continue, while ever she can tap into the fears and discomfort felt by many as the world they once felt comfortable in continues to change. Tapping into anti-Muslim feeling at a time when Muslim extremism is driving many terrorist attacks is guaranteed to get attention for the foreseeable future.

Worth reading, and thinking about.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Clare Allender says

Interesting essay, as someone who is only familiar with the last 5 years of Hanson's life, and the common snippets you hear in the media it was a concise overview of her career, the politics around it and her/one

nation's supporters. It was mostly based around survey data which was a great starting point for each section which was then built on. She's someone that you could have attacked outright and her supporters and given them labels but instead it was a calm and methodical investigation of how she has risen to power.

Lia says

As subtle as a sledgehammer.

Pauline Hansen is an extremely polarising character in Australian politics. I loathe her. As the daughter of a migrant I find her policies to be abhorrent.

Yet. She continues to gain momentum, not necessarily for the right reasons.

This essay from The Quarterly Essay was frustrating in that it explained many of the reasons why Ms Hansen gained popularity yet did nothing to analyse where this may take us in the future.

With the rise of ultra conservative politics the world over, the "us versus them" mentality is scary and divisive. I wish this essay did more to analyse a way through this difficult political time, rather than just explain why it has happened in the first place.

Oz says

Enjoyable read but not much new other than the Australian Election Study data

Cate says

Much food for thought if you want to try to get a clearer understanding of "Hansonism" in Australian politics. Very thought provoking. Well written and accessible. This is as much an analysis of how the politics of race is deployed in Australia - primarily around the major parties touting for business in the hard right while, as David Marr points out, most of us are scattered in the centre. Why? Because elections are lost and won in the marginal electorates. On a handful of votes.

Christopher Dean says

On television, especially on ABC's *Insiders*, David Marr can sometimes come across as pompous, perhaps even supercilious. Not so in his writing. *The White Queen* is an objective, forensic examination of race and politics in Australia focussing on the populist racist beliefs of Pauline Hanson - from the perceived threat of Asians 20 year ago to the dangers of Muslims today. Armed with data from the ANU's *Australian Electoral Study*, Marr meticulously and objectively explains why Hanson has been able to muster such large minority support throughout Australia. Marr states "I hope this essay puts a floor of fact under speculation about Hanson's people and her political appeal." In *The White Queen*, Marr's hope is certainly fulfilled.

Jennifer says

A fantastic dissection of race and politics. Marr clearly documents the descent of our politics into this unedifying dialogue, led by former Prime Minister John Howard. Oh for a leader, who is enough of a leader, to lead us out of this morass.

Sammy says

A hesitant four stars. I agree with everything Marr says, and he makes a compelling argument, especially when he steps outside Hanson's immediate pull and looks at the response of federal governments to her rise, and the broader question of race-baiting in politics.

Still, I don't know if he added that much to the conversation here, and I felt there were some surprising typographical and editorial errors which are atypical of this series. Nevertheless, it's important that we continue analysing these bizarre outliers in 21st century politics, especially given that the two "sides" of the aisle are increasingly reliant on the small (<9%) percentage of adult voters who fall into this category. A sickening group.
