



the flag wavers

Story Trent Dalton Photography David Kelly

Australia Day brawls, foreign student bashings, the
rise of hate groups – how did a love of Australia
turn into antipathy toward everyone else?

Under the Southern Cross they stand. Kulwant Singh with his hand on his heart reciting the affirmation of Australian citizenship, wife Sunita by his side. They're expecting a baby in June. The child will be raised Australian, they say, filled with Australian values: good humour, openness, a fair-go nature. Kulwant's parents, Mohan and Jogin, have travelled from India's Punjab region to see their boy become an Australian – on January 26 no less.

Mohan wears a gold turban. Sweat gathers on his forehead and tears well in his eyes. He knows how much his son has fallen for this island, how deeply enamoured he is with South-East Queensland and this suburban council park in Moorooka, in southern Brisbane, filled this morning with Australians who once called themselves Koreans and Sudanese and Ghanaians and Croatians and Lebanese and Vietnamese. Kulwant plans to join the Australian Defence Force. He says he would die for this country. This moment, he says, is the pinnacle of all of his 34 years. "Oh, I can't express how happy I am feeling now," he says. "The happiness is all around me like an ocean."

On the Gold Coast, Piggy stands in a black singlet and board shorts. He's a natural comic, the kind of knockabout 18-year-old who would have brought levity to a rain-sodden march through the Somme. He drinks Bundaberg Rum and cola. He wears a hat detailing the "Aussie Beer Dictionary" and drives a Torana, which today has two Australian flags attached to the windows, flapping furiously in a wind pushing across the Southport Spit. Cars have formed a row on the peninsula stretching 500m along the waterline: big four-wheel-drives and modified Commodores, Skylines and Ford Falcon utes. Each car has an Australian flag. Some have three, some four. Some have stickers: Southern Cross stars, or "Aussie N' Proud". One says: "Grown here, not flown here."

Piggy runs his hand along a Southern Cross tattoo on his forearm. "It means Australia, love it or leave it," he says. "I like that you can walk down the street here and not get shot like in Somalia. That's pretty much it right there."

At Burleigh Heads, further south, a young man has passed out and lies face down under an Australian flag on a beach teeming with people raising beer bottle toasts to nationhood. Brawls and riots have broken out in Burleigh on this national holiday for the past two years, and police have promised zero tolerance for

public drunkenness. The bloke lying under the flag celebrated the big day by slugging back a bottle of vodka before midday. He got aggressive and his mates abandoned him by the shoreline, where the tide rose up to his waist before a group of older drinkers dragged him up the beach.

Nicholas, 15, is draped in a flag as he trudges across the beach at Surfers Paradise. "It's tourist central now," he says. "It's Australia Day, hey, not international multicultural day." His friend Jarrod is 16. "It's sort of weird when it's Australia Day and you see all these people," he says. "You say, 'Happy Australia Day', and it's, like, '*Ohayou gozaimasu* [good morning]'."

"We're overpopulated," Nicholas says. "We got to get rid of them. More Australians and less non-Australians."

"Aussie, Aussie, Aussie!" a man hollers.

DENISE FROM EVERTON HILLS HAS WRITTEN

a letter to *The Courier-Mail*. "There was a time when I looked forward to celebrating Australia Day," she says. "Now, as each Australia Day dawns, I face it with dread. How many racist thugs will crawl out of the woodwork to wreak havoc this year?"

"The Australian flag should be a symbol of national pride, of mateship, of giving those less fortunate a fair go, of solidarity, of compassion," Denise continues. "Today, when I see our flag emblazoned on the chest of a young man's T-shirt, or flapping from a gatepost, or streaming from the window of a vehicle, I ask myself the question: Is it an expression of patriotism and love of country, or does it embody the sentiment, 'This is my country and you are not welcome'?"

At West End, in Brisbane's inner south, the 400-strong Australia Day Rage Against Racism march files through the gates of Musgrave Park. They've walked from Parliament House in searing heat, Australians of all colours pumping fists and shouting anti-racism slogans, their chants competing with a traditional 21-gun salute echoing from South Bank Parklands. Indigenous leader Paul Spearim takes to a stage overlooking the park. "This ain't no Australia Day," he booms into a microphone. "I'm not Australian ... There might be one day when I can walk down the street with my people at my side and say that I'm a proud Aussie. But I can't if I don't feel like it."

In the city's south a few days earlier, two Indian nationals had been allegedly attacked ►



in separate incidents within a few hours. In one, an Indian man using a public phone was allegedly assaulted and robbed. In the other incident, a 20-year-old Indian man was allegedly assaulted three times during an altercation with two men.

"This is a welcoming, tolerant society," acting premier Andrew Fraser quickly assured the public, as police rejected claims the attacks were racially motivated. But Taxi Council of Queensland CEO Blair Davies said he had little doubt there was a racial element to some of the increasing number of attacks on cab drivers. (Last year, Queensland drivers reported 789 assaults – an increase of 154 on 2007.) And taxi driver Sandeep Goyle announced to the world on television news that Indian students should no longer come to Australia.

It was more fuel for the bilateral furore over a spate of attacks on Indians in Sydney and Melbourne in the past year. Influential weekly news magazine *Outlook*, which boasts a readership of 1.5 million English-speaking Indians, in February published a cover story headlined "Why The Aussies Hate Us". Included were quotes from Jim Saleam, NSW head of anti-immigration party Australia First, about Indians "becoming a serious threat to white Australians in the job market".

Umesh Chandra, president of the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin Queensland, was appointed by Premier Anna Bligh as liaison officer to the state's 12,000 Indian students in late January. Visiting India shortly before the *Outlook* edition was released, he was interviewed by a number of broadcast journalists. "I had to correct them about what Australia really is and not how it has been blown up in Indian media," says Chandra. "In India, you talk to any Joe Blow in the street, any guy driving a taxi, and their perspective on racism is an Indian guy being bashed by an Australian."

There do, however, appear to be reasonable grounds for that perception. Each year since 2001, Professor Kevin Dunn of the University of Western Sydney has surveyed 12,000 people across the country about racism they have both perceived and received. He has just finalised new research on Indians. "Their experiences of racism are more than two times the average," Dunn says. "If you're of Indian background in Australia your likelihood of experiencing racism is high. In fact, higher than for indigenous Australians."

"What concerns me is the official denial of racism, which is now apparent in a number of different ways from our political leaders to our bureaucracies. Most Australians believe racism exists in Australia and we have found 85 per cent of people believe something should be done

about it. That makes political denial and inaction all the more perplexing. My concern is that does nourish the rise of organised racist groups."

Murri leader and university lecturer Sam Watson, who has called on the state government to class the two Brisbane attacks as hate crimes requiring mandatory jail terms, claims we're seeing a political whitewash. "Indian trade and Asian trade means real dollars," he tells *Qweekend*, "and [the government] will do anything to disguise what are blatantly racially motivated attacks on Indian ethnics. The racial genie was well and truly let out of the bottle in Queensland by Pauline Hanson and in 2010 there is still a deep undercurrent ... the political leadership doesn't have the integrity and the guts to tackle this head-on. So we see these young white Australian thugs wrapping themselves in the Australian flag to justify their outright racism."

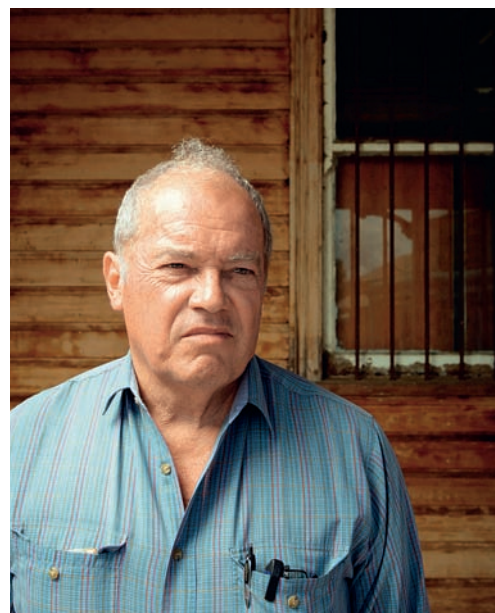
QUEENSLAND IS A STATE UNDER PRESSURE.

Each year an estimated 55,000 people move to the south-east, Australia's fastest-growing region, and there'll be four million people living in the region within two decades. This will generate demand for 575,000 new homes and 425,000 new jobs. In the past financial year alone, the state's population (now 4.5 million) swelled by 112,900, putting very real strain on infrastructure, jobs and lifestyle.

These pressures mix readily with the rhetoric of extreme nationalists, who often refer to an "explosion of blacks"; a state "overpopulated with Asians". Yet 40 per cent of the 32,496 overseas settler arrivals to Queensland in the year to June 30, 2008, were from New Zealand (13,009); 18.3 per cent were from the United Kingdom (5954); 4.8 per cent from South Africa (1570); 3.8 per cent from India (1228), and 2.6 per cent from China (846). Sudanese immigrant figures didn't chart, yet the estimated 6000 Sudanese living in Queensland are often drawn into race-hate campaigns. The largest group of people to arrive in the state between 2008-09 were from NSW (49,132).

A Galaxy poll released just before Australia Day showed 66 per cent of Australians believed immigration should be capped. In the past four years, similar polls have indicated Australians were reasonably comfortable with immigration levels. Immigration academic Dr Bob Birrell from Monash University tells *Qweekend* the figures show "the tide is turning". "The issue of how we cope with all these extra people has now moved toward the higher threshold of what counts in people's minds," he says. "And that feeling is very strong in Queensland."

Add to this the ghosts of the White Australia policy and One Nation party – along with post-September 11 fears and concern about refugees



arriving by boat – and Queensland starts to look bad for immigrants, at least on paper.

"Do we have a history of racism? Absolutely," says Dr Fiona Barlow from the University of Queensland's School of Psychology. "Is there still racism in Queensland? Without a doubt. Does this mean that we are all bad people and Queensland is doomed? Not at all." Barlow, who has spent two decades studying race relations in Australia, says "we spawned Pauline Hanson, endorsed the White Australia policy far longer than any other state, and continue to mistreat non-white Australians institutionally and interpersonally" but these examples "are not characteristic of Queenslanders alone, but wider Australia". It's the grouping phenomenon, she says, that has fuelled the rise of blind nationalism among some young white Australian men.

"For most of us, 'Australian' is a large part of our personal identity, and we want to celebrate it with our fellow Australians. So we wave the flag, idolise Ned Kelly, and proudly state that we are 'made in Australia'. There is nothing wrong with this ... the problem arises when national pride is associated with hatred of non-white Australians and immigrants. Often when



Divided we stand ...
(clockwise from right)
Piggy and Josh drink to
the nation; new citizens
Kulwant and Sunita
Singh with Kulwant's
parents Mohan and
Jogin on Australia
Day; the Australia First
Party's Perry Jewell;
flagging our national
day at Southport
(also opening pages).



we want to feel good about our group, we resort to bagging and insulting other groups.”

I ask Natalie Alberts, assistant director of the Musgrave Park Cultural Centre: are there racist groups operating in Queensland? She laughs and slaps her knees – apparently it’s a stupid question. “What about the KKK for a start?” she says.

On February 1, 2008, two weeks before Kevin Rudd’s formal apology to the Stolen Generations, it was reported that a 30-year-old Townsville man posted on YouTube a video of himself dressed in a Ku Klux Klan-style white-hooded uniform beside a burning cross. He said he filmed the video in response to Rudd’s apology. “My brother was living in Ingham with his wife,” says Alberts, “and they were terrorised by people smashing their windows wearing white pillowcases over their heads.”

In May last year, Thomas Robb, the Arkansas-based national director of major KKK faction The Knights Party, told the *Sunday Herald Sun* the group had infiltrated Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Darwin. The existence of a formal Queensland chapter of the Klan cannot be verified; Barlow says that if such groups do exist here, they are tiny minorities. However,

there are local versions on the theme. On the Gold Coast, the Queensland chapter of the Southern Cross Hammer Skinheads will this month host an international white pride festival. The Queensland group – which declined an interview request – is a member of the global US-born Hammerskin Nation. The Gold Coast event is sponsored by Blood & Honour, a neo-Nazi group that’s been banned in Germany.

The Queensland Anti-discrimination Act says serious racial vilification – inciting hatred of others by threatening physical harm – is a criminal offence, with a maximum penalty of a \$7000 fine or six months’ jail for individuals. But there are no specific hate-crime offences in Queensland’s criminal code; other charges relating to violence would need to be applied.

“The only Australian jurisdiction that has [hate-crime] laws is Western Australia,” says Gail Mason, director of the Sydney Institute of Criminology and a race-hate specialist. “If people make a complaint to a discrimination agency it can be referred to a prosecution, but there haven’t been any [race-hate] prosecutions anyhow, so it’s not used.”

Public acts of racism by groups such as the

Southern Cross Hammer Skinheads are rare, says Sydney-based human rights lawyer George Newhouse. The groups prefer to incite hatred anonymously through dedicated internet sites. Cyber-racism, he says, “is the new frontier for cowards and racists”. Newhouse is leading a first-of-its-kind legal action against Google Australia after his client, Aboriginal man Steve Hodder-Watt, complained to the Human Rights Commission about Google search results linking to a racist website. Google said it had removed the offending site from its search results, but the case is still before the commission. “I estimate there are more than 1000 of these race-hate sites throughout Australia and the world,” says Newhouse. “We are seeing the proliferation of vile material located in places that are outside the reach of the Australian authorities.”

Stormfront Down Under is the Australian face of a global Stormfront internet forum, which was reported in June 2008 to be attracting 40,000 unique users each day. Recently an Australian with the user name *Quejumpingafghan* posted a message: “Yesterday a little Sudo asked me for change, I ignored him, but I thought to myself, doesn’t he get given enough?” *Teutonic Wombat* from Rockhampton replied with a description of how he “once put a Sudanese mug on his butt in Brisbane”.

Rockhampton is home to a branch of the World Church of the Creator (aka the Creativity Movement), a group established in the US in 1973 “for the survival, expansion and advancement of our white race exclusively”. In 2002, WCC pamphlets referring to an “Aboriginal cancer” within the central Queensland city were distributed among the population. In Victoria, WCC spokesman “Reverend” Patrick O’Sullivan defended the group’s right to propagate its views: “I don’t care if they wish to call us racist – we believe in the white race, we believe in white racial loyalty.” In August that year he was sentenced to two years, nine months’ imprisonment for bashing and stabbing a man who questioned his beliefs. O’Sullivan was back speaking on behalf of his church last year, and today the Rockhampton branch mails out copies of publications such as *Nature’s Eternal Religion* and the *White Man’s Bible* to believers.

Amid the anger and frustration festering post-September 11, post-GFC, people are looking for scapegoats. And that considerable group of young Australian nationalists – chattering on the internet, convening in loungerooms or meeting on the Gold Coast – could prove a powerful force for a politician able to give their blind views vision. “These small groups ►

of people can do a great deal of damage, and that happens,” says the University of Western Sydney’s Professor Dunn. “If people who have these views begin to imagine that they have the consensus position – that they are the majority view – they become more emboldened.”

ABOUT 85KM WEST OF BRISBANE, PERRY

Jewell sips a glass of white wine in the Forest Hill pub. It’s the pub where he once hosted meetings of his Confederate Action Party, its members discussing policies such as “Abolish the Aboriginal Affairs Department” and “Cancel the refugee program”. Jewell presents as a knowledgeable high school history teacher, with the conservative dress sense to match. But all his history lessons are themed in social decay.

The CAP was the unofficial predecessor to One Nation, and Jewell a behind-the-scenes figure in the rise of Pauline Hanson in 1994. Where you have a vacuum in leadership, he says, “people will create a leader or a symbol for everything that is in their minds”. He says he advised Hanson, jailed in August 2003 for electoral fraud (the conviction was quashed the following November), “to stay in prison and we would have built the biggest political party this country has ever seen and we would have voted the bastards out next time round. She was brave. But she became an opportunist. And she became a blocking mechanism to the right wing. Pauline couldn’t talk in detail on a dozen different topics.” He tilts his head. “Try me. I sense these people would get behind someone with intelligence.”

Born in Northern Ireland to English parents in 1941, Jewell was raised in Kenya and Tanzania and worked in “military intelligence” in South Africa and what was then Rhodesia. He moved his family to Queensland in time to watch Joh Bjelke-Petersen’s National Party self-destruct, and after the 1990 suicide of his son, Wayne – his boy was, he later discovered, broke – he began tuning into the “dissent and discord” among Queenslanders. He began making notes about the fallout from what he considered poor government. He created 38 policies and founded the CAP on the verandah of his home on a small farm in Tarampa, north-west of Ipswich. He traversed the state in the passenger seats of transport trucks, recruiting members. At the party’s peak in 1994, he says, there were 5000 members in 72 branches in Queensland, NSW and Victoria.

Jewell is now a senior Queensland member of the Australia First Party, founded in 1996. The party boldly announced itself in July last year as the first anti-immigration party since One Nation to gain enough members (the



Starting over ... Mary Gbayou (left) and her sister Admira (right) with relatives at the Moorooka citizenship ceremony.

required 500) to contest a federal election.

Not far from Forest Hill is Crows Nest. In 2006, residents here and in nearby Toowoomba opened their letterboxes to find pamphlets saying “Toowoomba is Under Attack!” and outlining a “program of action” to halt a refugee “invasion” of the city. A supporting internet essay, co-written by Australia First’s NSW leader Jim Saleam, said: “Toowoomba is to be the subject of colonisation by African refugees drawn chiefly from Sudan.”

The city began accepting Sudanese through a refugee settlement program in 2000; it’s now home to more than 1000 Sudanese, who are supported by local church and community groups. Mark Copland, chairman of the Toowoomba Catholic Social Justice Commission, says he knows Sudanese families who’ve had rocks hurled at their homes. But it’s subtle acts of racism he sees more frequently: a side remark, a sneer. “There’s an Asian woman that works in this office,” he says. “Sometimes just walking home, young people will drive in a fast car and swerve towards her. I find this unbelievable.”

In February, Premier Bligh announced a plan to direct the flow of skilled migrants to regional areas in a bid to ease population pressures on the state’s south-east. Jewell, meanwhile, accuses Australia, France, Germany and “especially Britain” of intellectual theft by stealing skilled workers from Third World nations. “If God made man and put all these different races on this world, who are we to homogenise them all? Where are we going? What is wrong with friendly competition? We need Fortress Australia,” he says.

Similar views are held by Nationalist Alternative Australia, a nationwide, Melbourne-based group of student activists formed “to be the voice for the ordinary Australian”. It aims to “reaffirm Australian cultural and national identity and restore the sovereignty and independence of the Australian

nation”. One of the leaflets its members distribute through universities depicts visas on a conveyor belt, a boat in the background. “Overcrowded tutorials? Has your uni become a visa factory? Let your voice be heard with the pro-Aussie movement.”

Take away the obvious issue of colour and, try as they might, these nationalist groups seem unable to pinpoint the true nature of the Australian identity they hold so dear. The NAA, for instance, tells *Qweekend* that “what we consider the Australian identity is generally the identity the country had prior to it becoming necessary to tell people what being Australian is”.

ON THE SURFERS PARADISE BOARDWALK,

a Christian evangelist preaches to young surfers wrapped in Australian flags. The evangelist hands out cards with an image of the Southern Cross above the question: “Are you a good Aussie?” Text on the back of the card asks: “Does standing up for your mates make you a good Australian or is it something else? Let’s see if you are a good enough Aussie to get to Heaven.” Even the religious groups are co-opting the Australian identity – which, evidently, many believe can be encapsulated in a single word: “Aussie”.

“I would like to take nationalism back, in a sense,” says Barlow. “I would love to look at the flag and think, ‘There is someone who loves Australia, who is kind and welcoming to people of all backgrounds.’ This is not a pipe dream.”

At the Moorooka ceremony, to the side of the ceremonial tent, Norma Dors wipes away tears. A tall and proud woman from Liberia, on the western tip of Africa, she came to Australia last year, escaping civil war and chronic poverty. Through relatives, she’d organised passage to Australia for her daughter Frances when she was a toddler. She is 11 now. Dors feared her daughter wouldn’t recognise her at the airport but Frances ran to her with open arms.

Dors’s mother, Mary Gbayou, and her aunt, Admira Gbayou, have just become Australians. They were living last year in a refugee camp in Ghana, surviving on one daily meal of cassava soaked in milk. In the camps, says Dors, “they do anything to you that they want ... It was not safe anywhere. By grace of God we have found a life here.”

Dors will make her own Pledge of Commitment to Australia in good time. She turns back to the stage. She’s missed the first part of a rendition of the national anthem. But she nods her head joyfully as 42 new Australians sing the second verse. It’s the one about our radiant Southern Cross, and the boundless plains we have for those who’ve come across the seas. ■