

# Address by Geoffrey Blainey

Transcript of the Professor Geoffrey Blainey  
National Flag Day Address  
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Today is the 100th birthday of the Australian flag.

We honour those who designed it. We honour those who upheld it, decade after decade.

The Australian flag has grown in stature. In recent years the affections that surround it have increased. The search for a new flag has failed again and again.

The critics of Australia's flag - not the flag - have been found wanting.

Contrary to the critics, the flag of a modern nation is never meant to be an up-to-date information sheet. Otherwise we would often be redesigning it. We would have needed a new flag in 1915 - after Gallipoli - and a new flag in 1942, to commemorate the American alliance. We would have needed a new flag in 1967 to commemorate the Aboriginal referendum, and a new flag in the 1990s.

Some say that Australia's flag must be altered urgently because it carries relics of the flag of another nation. This is a strange argument. About four tenths of the United States' flag consists of the British red ensign that once flew on North American flag poles two centuries ago. Should we therefore tell the United States to wake up, to come up to date and fly a new flag?

The flag of republican France is seen as one of the most appropriate in the world. It is seen by some as essentially a revolutionary flag. But the white on the French flag stands for the French monarchy, which vanished a century and a quarter ago. Should Paris urgently design a new flag? I think not.

Some critics think that Australia needs a new flag because the old resembles the flag of New Zealand. That is New Zealand's bad luck - or good luck.

For too long we have been mesmerised by feeble arguments. It's about time we inspected other flags and so, at last, realized to the full the virtues of this flag.

No national flag is perfect. No national flag says everything. Australia's flag is not perfect, and never will be. But the nation's flag is infinitely better than those alternative flags that have been designed in recent years by amateurs and professionals and have been - every one of them - consigned to oblivion.

How should we summarise up the merits of Australia's flag?

It is the main symbol of national loyalty and national unity. It links the living and the dead.

It is the only flag, in the history of the world, to command the loyalties of the people of an entire continent.

It has flown over so many of Australia's triumphs and some of its saddest days.

The flag symbolises the Commonwealth, the States and the Territories.

It is the flag of the people as well as the nation.

The flag was designed by Australians, and remains the first choice of the majority of Australians, despite a long campaign to replace it with other flags.

It is one of the world's older national flags.

It salutes the stars of the Southern Cross which were shining above this continent when the first Aboriginal people arrived.

It acknowledges the British influence on Australia's way of life - its language, its long-standing constitutional monarchy, its parliaments and laws, its main religions, its literature, fine arts and sports.

It honours those who fought for their nation in two world wars and in other conflicts.

The flag was first unveiled on this day, 100 years ago, It is a day to be celebrated.

Long live Australia!