



**Reflections from  
First Nations Voices**  
on January 26<sup>th</sup>

the**lab**

As the evolving debate around our national day continues, our aim at The Lab is to not add to this debate, but to centre the lived experiences of First Nations people, and hope that by sharing their perspectives on January 26<sup>th</sup> we can encourage collective reflection, respect and learning.


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A hand-drawn sign on a dark background. The top part is black with the word 'CHANG' written in white, blocky letters. Below it, the word 'THE' is written in white, blocky letters. The bottom part is red with the word 'DATE' written in white, blocky letters. To the right of the text is a large yellow circle. The sign is held by a hand on the left side.

**“There is a healing that is needed  
and we need to do it together.”**

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Yvonne Weldon,  
Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council deputy chair



**"If we can start to look at this whole country as a crime scene, we might be able to get somewhere with truth telling."**

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Pastor Raymond Minniecon,  
Descendant of the Kabi Kabi nation and the Gurang Gurang nation.  
Director of Bunji Consultancies

# On why changing the date is inconsequential without structural change

“My greatest reservation about the ‘change the date’ movements is that, **in the absence of any structural reform, you’re changing the date but you’re not changing the structural powerlessness.**”

Supporting ‘change the date’ is fine, but really supporting the referendum and the Voice to Parliament is something that’s actually going to make a difference on the ground. It’s a tactile reform. So if changing the date comes after that, that makes a lot of sense, **but to change the date without any substantive reform, it’s a symbolic move.**

**Prof Megan Davis** - a Cobble Cobble woman, UNSW Professor, co-chair of the Uluru Dialogue



# On why support matters.

"But what's really lovely is **allies pointing out horrible behaviour and how horrible the date is**, because it makes **you not feel alone.**"

"I've seen 50,000 people march on Survival Day. If you told me years ago that there would be 50,000 people supporting Aboriginal people in Melbourne, or in Brisbane, or wherever, **that would have been a hard thing for me to imagine as a child.**"

**Steven Oliver** - descendant of the Kuku-Yalanji, Waanyi, Gangalidda, Woppaburra, Bundjalung and Biripi peoples – Performer, poet, comedian.



# On what the day feels like, and reminders it brings.

"The most common thing that we were feeling was that [the day] didn't represent and **wasn't ever going to represent how we felt in our heart about those experiences.**"

"The day holds so much tension, and there are people who advocate that the day is a celebration.

**But it's never been a celebration to us.**

"It is a constant **reminder of pain, a constant reminder of history, segregation, exclusion and brutality.** How is that a celebration?"

"Now people just need to learn to show up. The question needs to be asked... who are we as a nation? Who do we want to be?"

**Brooke Blurton** - Noongar Yamatji woman – Youth worker, Mental health advocate.



# On the power of discourse for change.

**“Truth telling has the power to heal.** We want to put all the information out there as educators so that people can make informed decisions about how they feel about it. We are hoping that if people have a better understanding, they will be more open to how it makes people feel.

**It is becoming a time where people are starting to listen more to First Nations voices.**

It’s actually quite interesting to listen because these major organisations are copping a little bit of heat about their stance. But it is true that these major organisations and people who are happy to put their voices forward to support First Nations peoples, **it’s because of that that we will actually change the tide eventually”**

**Sharon Williams** - Pitta Pitta woman and co-CEO education at Sharing Stories





# On why the day should still be marked as a day of mourning.

“Invasion Day is every day, we show up the other 364 days of the year and reflect on the stories of our ancestors.

It irks me when I see non-indigenous Australians think “Can’t we just change the date to make it more unifying?” **People need to come back to what those First Nations ancestors called for in 1938 which is a day of mourning.**

I personally don’t think we can re-write the fact that this awful history has happened in our nations story. But certainly, I think that Australia day as a celebration should be abolished, and it should be marked as a day of mourning. **What’s there to celebrate? Australia hasn’t earned the right to celebrate.”**

**Teela Reid** - a Wiradjuri and Wailwan woman, lawyer and co-founder of Blackfulla Bookclub



# References & Resources

- 1) Yvonne Weldon, Sydney Morning Herald, How Australia Day celebrations are changing
- 2) Prof Megan Davis: Sydney Morning Herald, Voice more important than 'warm and fuzzy' push to change Australia Day <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/voice-more-important-than-warm-and-fuzzy-push-to-change-australia-day-megan-davis-20230102-p5c9vd.html>
- 3) Steven Oliver <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/steven-oliver/gflbafv0k>
- 4) Sharon Williams <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2023/01/foundation-calls-for-sharing-of-first-nations-truth/>
- 5) The Briefing Podcast with Tom Tilley – Jan 26: A day of mourning for Indigenous Australians <https://play.listnr.com/podcast/the-briefing>

