



Why I Love Australia

[Charles Krauthammer](#)

Colaboraciones n° 1081

July 11, 2006

In the Australian House of Representatives last month, opposition member Julia Gillard interrupted a speech by the minister of health thusly: "I move that that sniveling grub over there be not further heard."

For that, the good woman was ordered removed from the House, if only for a day. She might have escaped that little time-out if she had responded to the speaker's demand for an apology with something other than "If I have offended grubs, I withdraw unconditionally."

God, I love Australia. Where else do you have a shadow health minister with such, er, starch? Of course I'm prejudiced, having married an Australian, but how not to like a country, in this age of sniveling grubs worldwide, whose treasurer sug-

gests to any person who "wants to live under sharia law" to try Saudi Arabia and Iran, "but not Australia." He was elaborating on an earlier suggestion that "people who ... don't want to live by Australian values and understand them, well then they can basically clear off." Contrast this with Canada, historically and culturally Australia's commonwealth twin, where last year Ontario actually gave serious consideration to allowing its Muslims to live under sharia law.

Such things don't happen in Australia. This is a place where, when the remains of a fallen soldier are accidentally switched with those of a Bosnian, the enraged widow picks up the phone late at night, calls the prime minister at home in bed and delivers a furious unedited rant -- which he publicly and graciously

accepts as fully deserved. Where Americans today sue, Australians slash and skewer.

For Americans, Australia engenders nostalgia for our own past, which we gauzily remember as infused with John Wayne plain-spokenness and vigor. Australia evokes an echo of our own frontier, which is why Australia is the only place you can unironically still shoot a Western.

It is surely the only place where you hear officials speaking plainly in defense of action. What other foreign minister but Australia's would see through "multilateralism," the fetish of every sniveling foreign policy grub from the Quai d'Orsay to Foggy Bottom, calling it correctly "a synonym for an ineffective and unfocused policy involving internationalism of the lowest common denominator"?

And with action comes bravery, from the transcendent courage of the doomed at Gallipoli to the playful insanity of Australian-rules football. How can you not like a country whose trademark sport has Attila-the-Hun rules, short pants and no padding -- a national passion that makes American football look positively pastoral?

That bravery breeds affection in America for another reason as well. Australia is the only country that has fought with the United States in every one of its major conflicts since 1914, the good and the bad, the winning and the losing.

Why? Because Australia's geographic and historical isolation has bred a wisdom about the structure of peace -- a wisdom that eludes most other countries. Australia has no illusions about the "international community" and its feckless institutions. An island of tranquility in a roiling region, Australia understands that peace and prosperity do not come with the air we breathe, but are maintained by power -- once the power of the British Empire, now the power of the United States.

Australia joined the faraway wars of early-20th-century Europe not out of imperial nostalgia, but out of a deep understanding that its fate and the fate of liberty were intimately bound with that of the British Empire as principal underwriter of the international system. Today the underwriter is America, and Australia understands that an American retreat or defeat -- a chastening consummation devoutly, if secretly, wished by many a Western ally -- would be catastrophic for Australia and for the world.

When Australian ambassadors in Washington express support for the U.S., it is heartfelt and unalloyed, never the "yes, but" of the other allies, perfunctory support followed by a list of complaints, slights and sage finger-wagging. Australia understands America's role and is sympathetic to its predicament as reluctant hegemon. That understanding has led it to share foxholes with Americans from Korea to Kabul. They fought with us at Tet and now in Baghdad. Not every engagement has ended well. But every

one was strenuous, and many quite friendless. Which is why America has such affection for a country

whose prime minister said after 9/11, "This is no time to be an 80 percent ally," and actually meant it.