I wonder is there anyone here who cannot remember how … and where they were … on September 11?

And I wonder how many of you wake, as I still do, every morning, with those horrible images at the front of your mind – and with a deep ache – a real WELTSCHMERZ – an ineffable and frustrating sadness crowding out everyday concerns. Frustrating, because it is so hard to know what nations should do, what individuals should do, to bring the world back into some kind of focus.

And how many of you are perplexed, as I am, that only this cataclysmic event could crowd the Tampa asylum-seeker crisis off the front page headlines – two events in quick succession reminding all of us of the discord, hatred and alienation felt by so many people on this complex globe of ours.

Why the hatred? Why the turbulence? Why the refuge in Australia?

I, myself, have little doubt that the deep-seated root cause of this individual revolution and the benefits brought through science and technology in terms of health, education, housing, material goods and lifestyle have been shared so unequally around the world. Ignorance permits hatred, poverty breeds despair, while knowledge and enough affluence to permit some leisure time bring joy in human diversity and interested appreciation of different cultures.

Australia is seen as a refuge simply because it represents the single most successful advanced experiment in multiculturalism in (modern) history – which brings us to today’s event, joyously positioned three quarters of the way through the year where we are celebrating Australia’s centenary of Federation – and before going into any detail, I simply want to quote a few words from Dr Charles Price’s chapter on multiculturalism:

The Australian population is not one where separate ethnic peoples live side by side with relatively little social intercourse, constantly perpetuating their own language and cultures and keeping distinct by continual marriage within the group. Well over two thirds of the Australian people have at least two ethnic origins, one half have three or more, and some as many as eight.

Price goes on to make the point that the celebration of diverse ethnicities permits us then to lay the stress on Australian ethnicity itself, on a truly Australian identity and ethos, on a deep and positive sense of Australian peoplehood.

So what is this wonderful Encyclopedia, *The Australian People*?
It is certainly history, going back 50,000 years. It is important sociology, documenting racial, cultural, political and economic determinants of nation building. It is a rich and precious source of information about particular community groups, relating the individual stories of no fewer than 125 different categories of settlers who followed the indigenous peoples as contributors to the story of Australia. It is a fine statistical work with well chosen figures and tables, illustrating important demographic points. It is a significant exercise in geography, detailing in many maps where people came and whither they went within this wide brown land.

I was particularly pleased that the First Australians held pride of place in the book, first in summary of the process of the peopling of Australia (Part I of the book), and then in a description of their societies and culture, their politics and law and their interactions with later settlers, which form Part II of the book.

I feel sure that Part III, the stories of the 125 groups of settlers, will find a wonderful resonance with readers. As a migrant myself, arriving from Austria a scant 62 years ago, I devoured the 6 pages on the Austrians, taking special pride in the achievements of the 2144 Austrian refugees who arrived pre-World War II, fleeing from Hitler’s 1000-year Reich, which unfortunately lasted 13 years too long. But leafing through so many of the other sections, one sensed an extraordinary confidence in the authenticity and authoritativeness of the work, at once eminently readable and at the same time a highly significant edifice of true scholarship. How carefully those contributors were chosen!

The fourth section of the book seeks to put it all together. How was the nation built? Who did and did not assimilate? How did citizenship evolve? How did a National identity emerge amidst productive diversity? How did the politics of ethnicity manifest itself? Where does the balance lie between fights and obligations? As you can see, the book does not shy away from controversy, but the calibre of the large, distinguished and wonderfully diverse group of contributors is such as to make even the most controversial views command respect.

It is hard for me to imagine a more lovingly produced book. From its magnificent jacket, its sturdy cover, to its 940 plus 20 beautifully printed pages on high quality paper, to the rich kaleidoscope of illustrations, the book is a privilege to hold, to read, to dip into, and doubtless for many of you, to give as a magnificent gift.

In closing, I wonder whether I may be permitted three self-indulgent reflections. First, I am the Chairman of Victoria’s Centenary of Federation Committee, and I am so thrilled that this 2nd edition of The Australian People can now be counted as a special contribution, and a lasting one, to our centenary celebrations. Secondly, Cambridge University Press are the co-publishers of the most successful of my books, the 3rd edition of which will soon appear, and it is so good to be with CUP on such a special occasion. Thirdly, the wonderful editor, James Jupp, to whom we all owe such an enormous debt, is a dear academic colleague with whom I worked closely during my years as President of the AAS, as we, sought with some success, areas where the natural sciences and the social sciences could work together for Australia’s benefit. The day really belongs to him, to CUP, and to the contributors.

To end where we began: if the 6 billion passengers of spaceship earth all had access to the set of ideas and ideals which gave birth to this Encyclopedia, there would have been no
Twin Towers disaster, no Tampa crisis. Knowledge expels prejudice, tender acceptance of the common humanity behind our glorious diversity will eventually conquer hatred.

As a major contribution to such knowledge, please welcome The Australian People, an Encyclopedia edited by James Jupp, which is hereby officially launched.