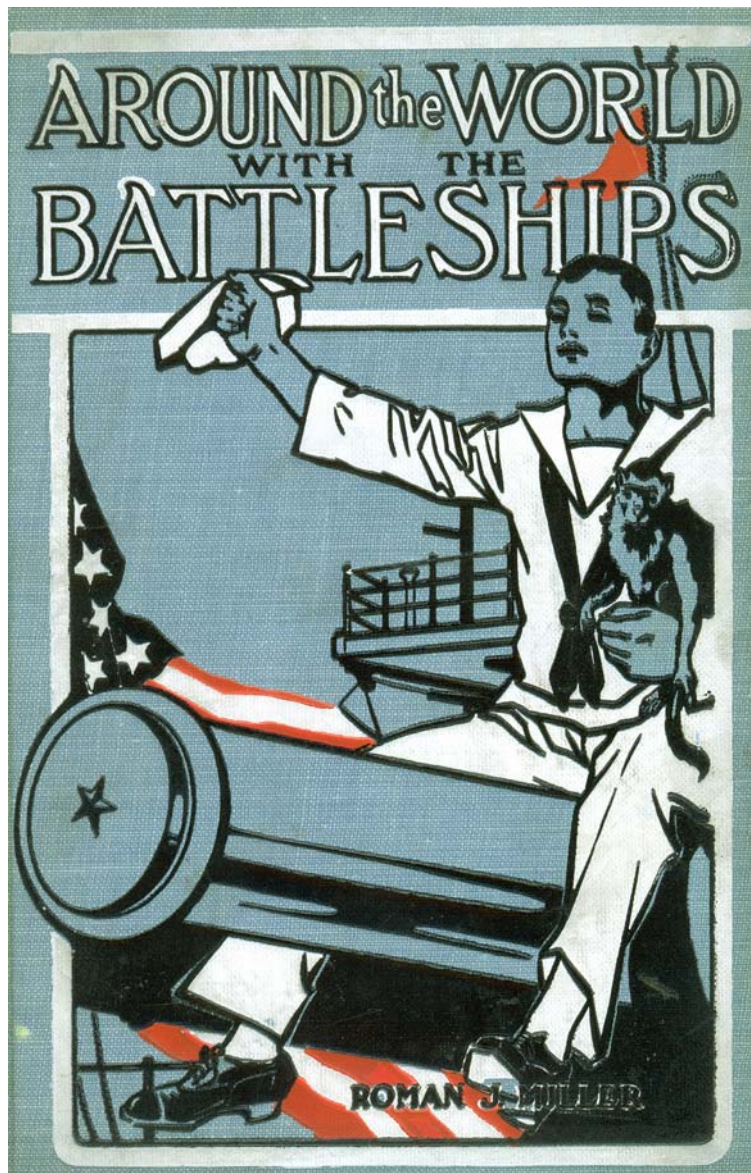


Alfred Deakin and the visit of the Great White Fleet, 1908



[front cover] *Around the World with the Battleships* / Roman J. Miller, Chicago :
A.C. McClurg and Co., 1909

**An Exhibition from the Special Collection,
Deakin University Library**

20 March – 1 June 2007

<http://www.deakin.edu.au/library/spc/>



Introduction

In the early years of the new Commonwealth of Australia, the United States of America was generally regarded admiringly by Australians as a democratic model to emulate. This high regard, coupled with a shift in international relations, led Alfred Deakin to invite the United States Fleet to visit Australia during its goodwill world tour of 1907-9.

This shift came about through the decision of Great Britain to withdraw its major warships from the Pacific to the North Sea. By 1906 there were no British battleships or cruisers in the Australian region and Japan had emerged as a major power after it destroyed much of the Russian Navy in the Battle of Tsushima in 1905. The growth of Japan was regarded with trepidation in Australia which saw itself as a bastion of white settlement in the Pacific.

Deakin decided to invite the so-called Great White Fleet (sixteen white-painted battleships) to visit Australia as a way of countering Japanese influence in the Pacific. Significantly, he made his invitation without consulting Britain and the Colonial Office which caused some degree of displeasure in British diplomatic circles. However the visit was enormously successful; large crowds of people lined the shores and attended functions to welcome the American sailors in Sydney, Melbourne and Albany.

Interestingly, after the visit by the Fleet, Deakin attempted to formalise Australia's relationship with the United States by proposing an extension of the Monroe Doctrine to cover the countries of the Pacific, which would then enjoy American military protection. The British Government refused to support his proposal, thus it was never forwarded to the U.S. Government, but it foreshadowed the alliance that was to come into being some years later and which has since become the cornerstone of Australia's defence policy.

Bibliography

- Meaney, Neville K. "'A Proposition of the Highest Importance' Alfred Deakin's Pacific Agreement proposal and its significance for Australian-Imperial relations", *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1967, pp. 200-213.
- Meaney, Neville K. *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901-14*, Sydney University Press, 1976.
- Megaw, Ruth "Australia and the Great White Fleet 1908", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 56, pt 2, June 1970, pp. 121-133.
- Walker, David *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939*, University of Queensland Press, 1999.
- Waterhouse, Richard "The Beginning of Hegemony or a Confluence of Interests: the Australian-American Relationship, 1788-1908", *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1990, pp. 12-19.

Welcome to the Fleet!

Of the many celebrations arranged for the Fleet, those held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Sydney Cricket Ground were particularly large and elaborate, involving hundreds of school children in choreographed displays. The image below shows school children at the Sydney Cricket Ground spelling out the words 'Hail Columbia', the name of one of the ships.



Photograph from *Around the World with the Battleships* / Roman J. Miller, Chicago : A.C. McClurg and Co., 1909.



[Welcome to American Fleet; songs to be sung by public school children at display on Sydney Cricket Ground, August, 1908](#)

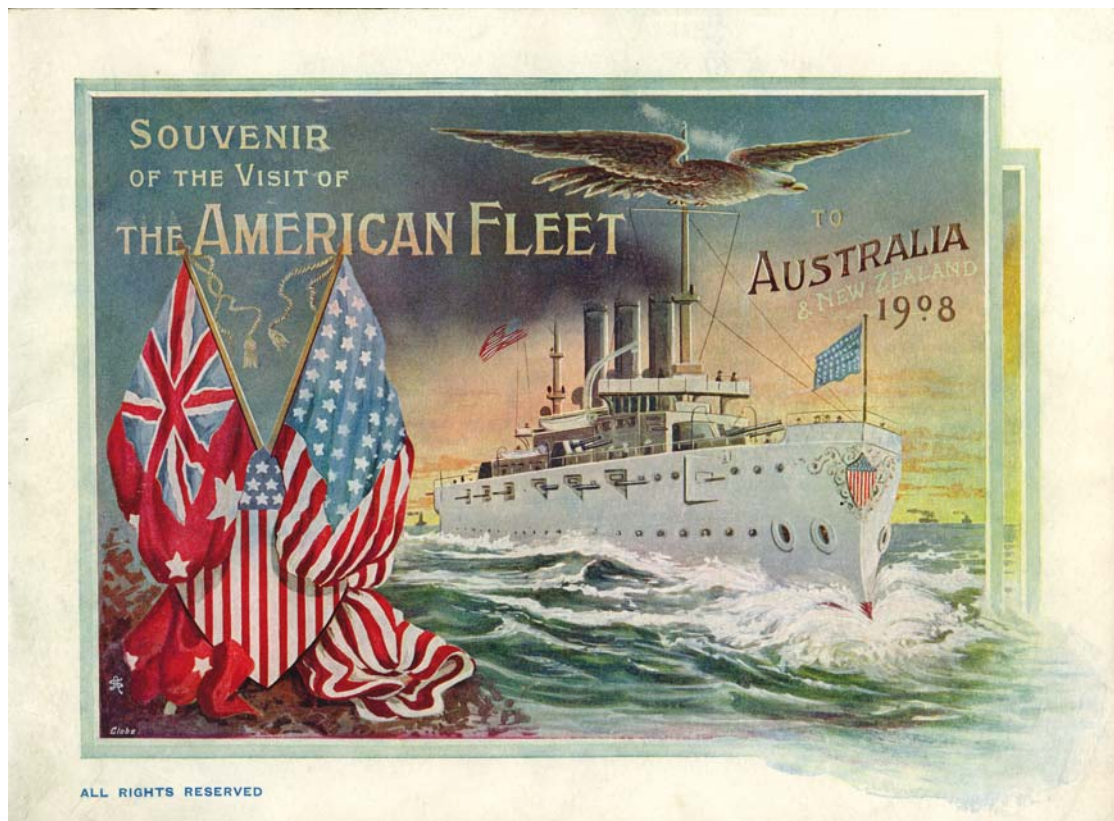


[Reception and grand concert : given in honour of the visit of Rear-Admiral Sperry, Commander-in-Chief, and the Officers of the United States Atlantic fleet : Exhibition Building, Melbourne, 2nd September, 1908](#)

[Melbourne : Govt. of Victoria, 1908]

Souvenirs from the visit

The visit of the Fleet generated a huge amount of popular interest, thus a great many souvenirs were produced to mark the occasion. Postcards, books, programs and other souvenirs were produced and special 'Fleet' issues of existing journals were published to tap into the fascination caused by the visit.



[Souvenir of the visit of the American Fleet to Australia and New Zealand 1908](#)
(Melbourne : Osboldstone, [1908])



This book contains photographs of Australia and its capital cities, to serve as a reminder of their visit for the members of the U.S. Fleet.

[title page] [Glimpses of Australia : souvenir for the United States Navy, August-September, 1908](#)
(Melbourne : Dept. of External Affairs, 1908; Sydney : Government Printer)



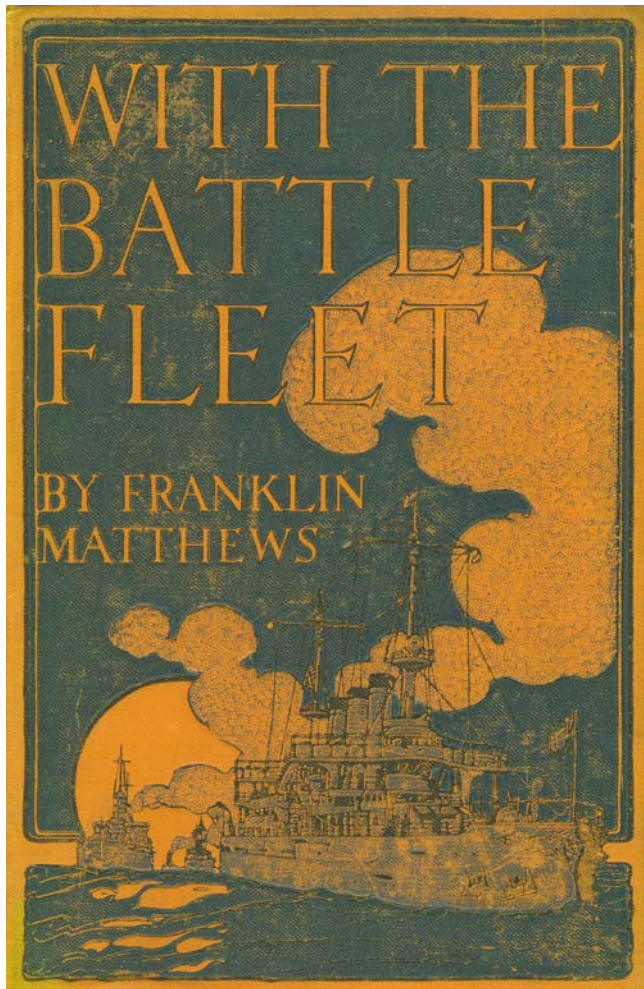
[Souvenir : \[36 views\] illustrative of the American Fleet's visit to Australia, 1908](#)
Sydney [N.S.W.] : N.S.W. Bookstall Co., 1908

The front cover of this souvenir programme published by *Punch* was painted by the artist Will Dyson.



[The American Fleet festivities, 1908 : the official souvenir programme for Victoria](#)
Melbourne : Punch, 1908

From those on board...



Franklin Matthews was a reporter who travelled with the Fleet. He corresponded with Alfred Deakin and sent him a complimentary copy of this book and its sequel.

[With the Battle Fleet](#) / Franklin Matthews. (New York : B.W. Huebsch, 1909)



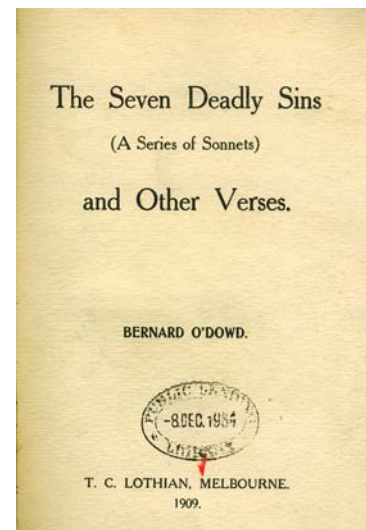
Roman Miller was the Chief Turret Captain on the U.S.S. *Vermont* and this is his account of the tour by the U.S. Fleet.

[Around the World with the Battleships](#) / Roman J. Miller. (Chicago : A.C. McClurg and Co., 1909)

Conflicting views...

This poem by Bernard O'Dowd first appeared in *The Socialist* and is interesting as it presents a negative view of the visit by the U.S. Fleet, which he describes as a "...wan array of hell-ships vomiting their Will-to-Slay..."

Although public opinion was largely in favour of the United States and its Fleet, some left wing sections of the media and strongly nationalistic publications such as *The Bulletin* were against it. O'Dowd was a radical nationalist who believed that poetry could be used to change and improve society.



True America's Message ["Fleet" Week, 1908.] / Bernard O'Dowd.
[title page] [The Seven Deadly Sins \(A Series of Sonnets\) and other verses.](#)
Melbourne : T.C. Lothian, 1909



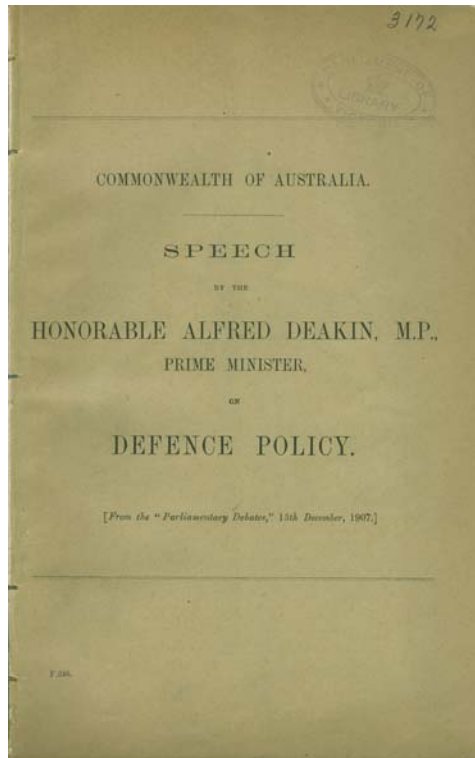
The front cover of this special issue was painted by Norman Lindsay and shows the 'friendly white hand' of the U.S. (as represented by its Fleet) being extended across the Pacific to Australia.

The Fleet was painted white to make the ships highly visible, thus clearly demonstrating the friendly intentions of the tour. It was in times of war that ships were painted black (later grey) to reduce their visibility to an enemy.

[The Lone Hand](#) (American Fleet number) Aug. 1, 1908

A Fleet for Australia?

The issue of an 'Australian' navy had been a topic of discussion since the 1890s and was to finally come to fruition after the Imperial Conference of 1909 when it was decided that there should be an Australian Fleet. Alfred Deakin approved the tender to construct the battle cruiser HMAS *Australia* in 1910, just before the elections that were to end his third and final term as Prime Minister and in 1911, King George V granted the title of 'Royal Australian Navy' to Australia's fledgling fleet.



[Speech by the Honorable Alfred Deakin, M.P., Prime Minister, on defence policy](#)
Melbourne : J. Kemp, Acting Govt. Printer, [1907]

[The Naval Defence of Australia](#) / L.H. Hordern.
(Melbourne : Imperial Federation League of Australia, 1908)

