



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Hughes, Mr Robert Studley Forrest, AO

SPEECH

Wednesday, 15 August 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Speaker McCormack, Michael, MP	Question No.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (12:23): From the very first page of his mighty work *The Fatal Shore*, the late Robert Hughes gets the reader in with his superb use of words:

In 1770 Captain James Cook had made landfall on the unexplored east coast of this utterly enigmatic continent, stopped for a short while at a place named Botany Bay and gone north again. Since then no ship had called: not a word, not an observation, for seventeen years, each one of which was exactly like the thousands that had preceded it, locked in its historical immensity of blue heat, bush, sandstone and the measured booming of glassy Pacific rollers.

Stirring stuff, wonderfully woven—there is nothing better than excellent writing. It compels you to read on and on. This book is one of those you cannot put down, even though it is a weighty tome. It tells the tale of the brutal transportation of men, women and children from Georgian Britain—and being a staunch advocate for the Australian Republican movement, Hughes would probably prefer that to 'Great Britain'—into a harsh, cruel, penal system. This was the origin of modern Australia.

Published in 1987, *The Fatal Shore* was a prize-winning epic and a No. 1 international bestseller. I know Hughes's works are immensely enjoyed by the many book clubs throughout the Riverina and are regularly borrowed from regional libraries. Hughes contributed much more than just this cleverly crafted account of the historical, political and sociological reasons which prompted British settlement of our great country.

Sydney born Robert Studley Forrest Hughes AO died on 6 August, aged 74 years. He was an iconic art critic, author and maker of television documentaries. The member for Wentworth, husband of Hughes's niece Lucy, did marvellous justice to Hughes's well lived life in our parliament yesterday. We pay condolences to those Robert Hughes has left behind. We mourn his passing and we thank him for the extraordinary gift he left us in the form of his works, which will be read, reread and treasured for as long as the written word endures.