

humanitarian aid, rather than considering structural change in global relations of privilege and dominance. Nonetheless, the use of the term 'racist' to describe detention policy recognises that racism is not just a matter of conscious prejudicial intent, but also of systematically inequitable outcomes (although there is also plenty of evidence in the book of prejudicial intent).

It should be said, however, that extended analysis is clearly not the book's intent. Rather it seems committed to a direct aim: to provide incontrovertible evidence of the dysfunctionality of the system, in a form that will be useful for those with the power to make changes. The book is thus laid out in formal and simple report style, with an executive summary, terms of reference, and recommendations. The recommendations are simple: Remove racism, restore human rights, reinstitute accountability.

It hardly needs to be said that following these recommendations requires dismantling the system of detention. Fortunately, as I write, the Rudd government appears to be taking seriously its commitment to use the brand new detention centre on Christmas Island only as a last resort, and to genuinely process new claims as quickly as possible. But as the hunger strikes in Villawood in early November 2008 demonstrate, the detention system is not yet a matter of the past. And its effects on those who have lived through it, those who died within it, and their children, are likely to continue for generations.

In its first week of publication, *Human Rights Overboard* was named in Parliament by South Australian Senator Sarah Hanson Young, who called for a royal commission into Australia's immigration detention. The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Evans, responded by stating that he was not interested in going over the actions of the past government. But as the Parliamentary Apology to the Stolen Generations has recently demonstrated, public recognition can make a difference, even if it cannot reverse history. Dead people cannot be brought back to life; years lost to imprisonment, injustice, fear and despair cannot be restored. But the further damage done by the relegation of these experiences to invisibility and insignificance can be mitigated by public

recognition and acknowledgement that what was done was abusive, and that it matters. *Human Rights Overboard* helps to remedy such invisibility, and in a tone that makes it clear where responsibility lies.

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HARPS AND ANGELS

Randy Newman; Nonesuch/Warner, 2008; \$29.99 (CD)

Randy Newman's *Harps and Angels* was promoted as his 'first album of new material in nine years', but it's really business as usual. Those familiar quirky lyrics, nuanced ragtime rhythms and rich orchestrations flow so easily that listening is like renewing an old friendship. Although the 10 tracks clock in at under 35 minutes, each is near-perfect. And while Newman's satirical subtleties fail to register with some Americans, it's probably because the good ole US of A has never been comfortable with self-criticism. Don't be fooled by the disarming title opener, a gently amusing meditation on death set to a jazzy-blues arrangement. The real sting comes in acerbic songs like 'Korean Parents', 'A Piece of the Pie' and, at the album's core, 'A Few Words in Defense of Our Country', which compares the Bush administration's *war on terror* with the Inquisition — 'Like the Spanish armada, we're adrift in the land of the brave and the home of the free'. Nor do the idle rich evade Newman's wrath ('Easy Street'), and he makes room for the vagaries of love on 'Potholes' and 'Only a Girl'. But the best is saved for last, with the gorgeous 'Feels Like Home' — a classic Newman ballad.

MIKE DALY is a journalist and music reviewer.