



Larrikins: A History

Melissa Bellanta

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Australia has often been said to possess a “larrikin streak,” from the *Stiffy and Mo* cartoons and the true-blue Crocodile Hunter to the characters in the silent film *The Sentimental Bloke*. When it first emerged around 1870, *larrikin* was a term of abuse, used to describe teenage, working-class hell-raisers who populated dance halls and cheap theaters, and this account journeys through the street-based youth subculture known as larrikinism between 1870 and 1920, swerving through the streets of Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney. Offering a glimpse into the lives of Australia’s first larrikins—and discussing bare-knuckle fighting, football-barracking, and knicker-flashing teenage girls—it charts the development of Australia’s larrikinism and presents fascinating historical perspectives on current youth issues, including gang violence, racist riots, and raunchy culture among adolescent girls.

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