



ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SUNDAY 3 JULY NAIDOC WEEK 3 - 10 JULY

ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

The Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for a constitutionally protected **Voice to Parliament, Treaty, Truth**. The sequence is deliberate. It was based upon recognition by Indigenous people that public institutions, politicians and political parties rarely listen to what Indigenous peoples say about their lives and aspirations.

A **Voice to Parliament** is a structural reform that requires an amendment to the text of the Australian Constitution through a referendum of the Australian people. **Treaty** and **truth-telling** do not require constitutional amendment. Five years after the publication of the Statement from the Heart, plans for a referendum appear to be underway.

AUSTRALIAN & ABORIGINAL HISTORY

In 1968, the renowned anthropologist, W.E.H Stanner delivered the Boyer Lectures that marked a turning point in Australian history. Stanner argued that Australia's sense of its past, its collective memory, had been built on a state of forgetting, which couldn't "be explained by absent-mindedness."

It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape.

What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale.

THE NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT OUR HISTORY

The journalist David Marr writing on Aboriginal history in The Guardian in 2019 observed:

We're only human. We hang on to lies that comfort us. A big consoling lie that still hangs around this history of slaughter and dispossession is that we can't apply the outlook of the 21st century to killings on the frontier.

In the same article, David Marr reports that much of the violence and murder of Aboriginal people is well documented in the newspapers of the time. Such as this from Carl Feilberg editor of *The Queenslander* in 1880:

It is a fitful war of extermination waged upon the blacks, something after the fashion which other

settlers wage war upon noxious wild beasts. The savages, hunted from places where they have been accustomed to find food, driven into barren ranges, shot like wild dogs at sight ...

The need to know more about Australian and Aboriginal history was constantly raised by First Nations people during the dialogue process that led to the Statement from the Heart.

Following the one page Statement is 'Our Story' which attempts to capture the Aboriginal history of Australia. It begins:

Our First Nations are extraordinarily diverse cultures, living in an astounding array of environments, multi-lingual across many hundreds of languages and dialects. The continent was occupied by our people and the footprints of our ancestors traversed the entire landscape. Our songlines covered vast distances, uniting peoples in shared stories and religion. The entire land and seascape is named, and the cultural memory of our old people is written there. This rich diversity of our origins was eventually ruptured by colonisation. Violent dispossession and the struggle to survive a relentless inhumanity has marked our common history. The First Nations Regional Dialogues on constitutional reform bore witness to our shared stories.

Now is an important opportunity for the First Nations to tell the truth about history in our own voices and from our own point of view.

And for mainstream Australians to hear those voices and to reconsider what they know and understand about their nation's history. This will be challenging, but the truth about invasion needs to be told.

COLONIAL MASSACRE MAP

Professor Lyndal Ryan and her team at Newcastle University have documented a map of Colonial Massacres across Australia. It is regularly updated as new information comes to light.

The map is available at: <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/map.php>

Professor Ryan writes about some of the euphemisms for the frontier massacres:

While some frontier massacres were widely publicised, in most cases a code of silence was imposed in colonial communities in the immediate aftermath. Frontier massacres were only referred to indirectly. According to The Queenslander, 1 May 1880, p.560, the 'bush slang' word 'dispersal' was often used as a convenient euphemism for 'wholesale massacre'. Other euphemisms such as 'clear the area', 'pacify' 'teach

them a lesson,' 'affray' or 'fell upon' were also used.

Frontier massacres are sometimes alluded to in placenames, such as Skull Creek, Waterloo Plains, or Blackfellows Bones Bore, and in others, the word 'murdering' such as 'Murdering Gully' appears. Places are also sometimes named after colonists who have committed frontier massacres. They include the town, 'Bunbury' in Western Australia, named after Lieutenant William Bunbury who was the key perpetrator in several frontier massacres in 1836-7. 'Coutts Crossing' in New South Wales, is named after settler Thomas Coutts who poisoned 14 Aboriginal people in the 1840s.

THE 2020 RECONCILIATION WALK



Twenty years after the remarkable demonstration of support, the question remains as to whether we are closer to a 'reconciled' Australia. Truth telling about our history is still challenging for many. The track-record of action documented annually in the Closing the Gap Report leaves much to be desired in improving the lives of First Nations peoples.

However, the impact of the 2020 Reconciliation Walk still resonates with Indigenous participants such as Wiradjuri artist Ngari Reynolds who recalled:

'The vision of that walk has never left me and I have painted Sorry on a few of my paintings. There was a plane flying above us all writing Sorry in the sky and I didn't have my camera which disappointed me. But instead my mind became my camera and that vision will never be lost.'

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

James Baldwin

References

Megan Davis & George Williams, *Everything You Need to Know About The Uluru Statement From the Heart*. University of NSW Press, Sydney, 2021

Colonial Frontier Massacres, Australia 1780-1930 v3 <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/map.php>

David Marr *The Guardian* 18 November 2019

<https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/>