

The Invasion of Australia: Official, At Last

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The City of Sydney has voted to replace the words “European arrival” in the official record with “invasion”. The deputy lord mayor, Marcelle Hoff, says it is intellectually dishonest to use any other word in describing how Aboriginal Australia was dispossessed by the British. “We were invaded,” said Paul Morris, an Aboriginal adviser to the council. “It is the truth and it shouldn’t be watered down. We wouldn’t expect Jewish people to accept a watered-down version of the Holocaust, so why should we?”

In 2008, the then prime minister Kevin Rudd formally apologised to Aborigines wrenched from their families as children under a policy inspired by the crypto-fascist theories of eugenics. White Australia was said to be coming to terms with its rapacious past, and present. Was it? The Rudd government, noted a Sydney Morning Herald editorial, “has moved quickly to clear away this piece of political wreckage in a way that responds to some of its supporters’ emotional needs, yet it changes nothing. It is a shrewd manoeuvre.”

The City of Sydney ruling is a very different gesture, and admirable; for it reflects not a liberal and limited “sorry campaign”, seeking feel-good “reconciliation” rather than justice, but counters a cowardly movement of historical revision in which a collection of far-right politicians, journalists and minor academics claimed there was no invasion, no genocide, no Stolen Generation, no racism.

The platform for these holocaust deniers is the Murdoch press, which has long run its own insidious campaign against the indigenous population, presenting them as victims of each other or as noble savages requiring firm direction: the eugenicists’ view. Favoured black “leaders” who tell the white elite what it wants to hear while blaming their own people for their poverty, provide a PC cover for a racism that often shocks foreign visitors. Today, the first Australians have one of the shortest life expectancies in the world and are incarcerated at five times the rate of blacks in apartheid South Africa. Go to the outback and see the children blinded by trachoma, a biblical disease, entirely preventable, eradicated in third world countries but not in rich Australia. The Aboriginal people are both Australia’s secret and this otherwise derivative society’s most amazing distinction: the world’s oldest society.

In its landmark rejection of historical propaganda, Sydney, the country oldest and largest city, recognises black Australia’s “cultural endurance” and, without saying so directly, a growing resistance to an outrage known as “the intervention”. In 2007, John Howard sent the army into Aboriginal Australia to “protect the children” who, said his minister for indigenous affairs, were being abused in “unthinkable numbers”. It is striking how Australia’s incestuous political and media elite so often rounds on the tiny black minority with all the fervour of the guilty, unaware perhaps that the national mythology and psyche remain culpably damaged while a nationhood, once stolen, is not returned to the original

inhabitants.

Journalists accepted the Howard government's reason for "intervening" and went hunting for the lurid. One national TV programme used an "anonymous youth worker" to allege "sex slavery" rings among the Mutitjulu people. He was later exposed as a federal government official and his "evidence" discredited. Of 7433 Aboriginal children examined by doctors, just four were identified as possible cases of abuse. There were no "unthinkable numbers". The rate was around that of white child abuse. The difference was that no soldiers invaded the beachside suburbs, no white parents were swept aside, their wages diminished and welfare "quarantined". It was all a mighty charade, but with serious purpose.

The Labor governments that followed Howard have reinforced the new controlling powers over black homelands: the strict Julia Gillard especially: a prime minister who lectures her compatriots on the virtues of colonial wars that "make us who we are today" and imprisons refugees from those wars indefinitely, including children, on an offshore island not deemed to be Australia, which it is.

In the Northern Territory, the Gillard government are effectively driving Aboriginal communities into apartheid areas where they will be "economically viable". The undeclared reason is that the Northern Territory is the only part of Australia where Aborigines have comprehensive land rights, and that here lies some of the world's biggest deposits of uranium, and other minerals. The most powerful political force in Australia is the multi-billion dollar mining industry. Canberra wants to mine and sell and those bloody blackfellas are in the way again. But this time they are organised, articulate, militant, a resistance of conscience and culture. They know it is a second invasion. Having finally uttered the forbidden word, white Australians should stand with them.

John Pilger's film, The War You Don't See, is available on www.johnpilger.com

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