**White Myth-Making and the State of Denial**

**By Gary Foley**

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White Australia has a Black History, but it also has a long history of denial of that fact. It also has an extensive track record of carefully constructing and reinforcing its own mythologies that help to maintain its denialism. But we don’t really have to go far back into history to gain an understanding of how white-Australia creates and embeds its own mythologies, we have examples happening around us right here and now.

A classic example of a current myth in the process of being assembled and propagated can be seen in the description of events at the Aboriginal Embassy on 26th January this year as a ‘riot’. It should come as no surprise that the commercial media should enthusiastically embrace this inaccurate description, but even the once respected ABC News has now taken to using this term on every occasion the events of 26th January are mentioned in its news bulletins.

Yet eyewitness reports and even the television footage of that day are clear evidence that suggestions that there was some sort of Aboriginal ‘riot’ are pure fantasy. But White Australian ‘journalists’ appear determined to maintain the lie that what happened was that our Prime Minister was under grave threat from some sort of Aboriginal riot. However, it is obvious from the television images that the only threat to Julia Gillard that day was from paranoid, over-zealous police officers manhandling her in a most undignified way. And was that a smile I saw on Gillard’s face as I saw her being closely cuddled by that large and manly police officer?

That otherwise seemingly intelligent purveyors of information can so blatantly misrepresent what the television images clearly show is a remarkable illustration of a myth in the process of being constructed. It should prompt us to think about other recent examples of myths that have now become embedded as part of the continuing denialism that pervades Australians perceptions of themselves and us.

Two of the worst examples that immediately spring to mind are the myth that the Mabo Decision of the High Court in 1992 and the subsequent Native Title Act 1993 gave ‘land justice’ to Aboriginal people, and that Kevin Rudd has apologised to the Aboriginal people. Australians like to cite these two ‘facts’ as evidence that this nation has progressive policies in relation to Aboriginal people.

When the Native Title Act (NTA) was passed in Parliament it was hailed as a great moment for Aboriginal Australia (amid the clinking of champagne glasses) by the then prime Minister Keating and his retinue of Aboriginal ‘advisors’ who had ‘negotiated’ the deal with him (key ones being Marcia Langton, Noel Pearson and Pat Dodson). Noel Pearson was particularly effusive of the Act back in 1993, after all he was one of its main creators, but by February 2010 he had done a double back-flip now describing the NTA as “a travesty and a quagmire” as he accused the judicial system of “failing to serve Indigenous Australians”.

This about-face by Pearson was possibly because he had finally come to realise what Michael Mansell and I had said in 1993, which was that the Native Title Act was a fraud and a farce and certainly did not give land justice to Aboriginal Australians. Yet most Australians cling to the belief that their country had resolved Aboriginal claims for land and sovereignty through the passing of the Native Title Act in 1993. This is white Australian myth-making and denialism of a high order.

Then we have the famous “apology” by Kevin Rudd in 2008. This is already firmly embedded in white mythology as “Kevin Rudd’s apology to the Aboriginal people” and is viewed (at least by ALL in the mainstream media) as a cathartic event that has now absolved White Australia for past misdeeds and was therefore an important step towards an intangible creature called “reconciliation”.

These notions belie the truth. The fact is that Kevin Rudd did not apologise to the “Aboriginal people”, but rather to a small segment of the Aboriginal community known as the “Stolen Generation”. This may well have been good news for those who were of the stolen generations, but Rudd’s intricately constructed and carefully worded apology deftly avoided apologising to ALL Aboriginal peoples. But that didn’t matter because Canberra’s spin-doctors and the Parliamentary Press Gallery instantly misconstrued it into a general apology and that was that. We now again have the ABC news service repeating this myth on a daily basis, and the not so subtle falsification of history continues unchallenged. But as most Aboriginal people know, the apology ultimately served the purpose of appeasing the guilt of White Australia, rather than bringing about any meaningful change in the circumstances of most Black Australians.

What we are seeing happening around us is a perfect example of how myths are manufactured and embedded in a society’s sub-consciousness through mass media, government propaganda and the education system and then become accepted “truths” of history. This is why it is so important for Aboriginal people and their genuine white supporters to remain ever vigilant to the lies and distortions that creep into mainstream society’s perceptions of itself. If we too get sucked in by some of the white-mans mythology we can become our own worst enemies.

It is only through an informed, rational and intelligent public debate that we can really counter some of the dangerous myths that are being created in our midst. And we can only have such a debate when all Australians have a greater awareness of the real situation that confronts Aboriginal peoples and when they are able to see through many of the lies that currently constitute Australian ‘history’. Can this ever happen? I am not sure, but somehow I doubt it.

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