

## Tinsel and Glitter Won't End Racism

By Kim Bullimore

SYDNEY—The day after the Olympic opening ceremony, the Australian establishment media outdid themselves with superlatives, hyperbole and pure dross. Australians both Black and White can now stand proud, they said, hand in hand, like in the ceremony itself.

The inclusion of 750 indigenous dancers from Arnhem Land, the Torres Strait, central Australia and the Kimberley, as well as the choice of Nova Peris-Kneebone as the first Olympic torch bearer and Cathy Freeman, who lit the Olympic cauldron, as the last, was heralded as a “powerful statement of unity and purposeful direction.”

The *Sydney Morning Herald* announced joyfully that “the Dreamtime figure and the young Australian spirit walking hand and hand into the future” represents the “continuation of the story of Australia into an era of reconciliation,” while *The Australian* declared “it amounted to recognition of a desire for Reconciliation.”

Similar sentiments were reflected by several prominent indigenous people, including Freeman herself and Geoff Clarke, the chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

Decide for yourself how “delightful” was the portrayal of the meeting of old and new cultures (and Victra lawn mowers and tin dunnies).

## First Australian Aborigine Wins Olympics

In a herstorical first, an Australian Aborigine woman won the Olympics gold in the 400 meter dash amidst the wild, thunderous applause of the whole of Australia.

Cathy Freeman won the gold all of Australia craved. And together with other Aborigines (a diminishing population at 386,000), she celebrated by carrying the red, yellow and black aboriginal flag along with the Australian banner during her victory lap.

The first of her race to win an individual Olympic gold medal,

But as for matters of substance, this “spectacular” will do nothing to change the overwhelming social and economic disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffer.

Symbols and gestures are not justice.

On Friday evening, the stylised, choreographed dreams of one blonde, white child and a sanitised and white-washed version of Australian history were sprayed into living rooms across the world.

At the same instant, hundreds of indigenous children went to bed hungry, while others had nowhere to sleep.

Hundreds of their brothers, sisters and even parents were in jail for “crimes” no white person would ever be punished for.

Freeman easily outran Lorraine Graham of Jamaica and Katharine Merry of Britain.

“The pressure was a lot in front of my home crowd,” she said. “This has been a dream since I was a little girl.”

Source: Associated Press, 27 September 2000

Hundreds of their grandparents were suffering from diseases, like trachoma, that few whites will ever have any experience of.

You can't end centuries of racism and dispossession by including a few Aboriginal athletes and dancers in a ceremonial celebration of an “Australian-ness” which has almost destroyed this land's first peoples.

For there to be justice, there must be real change: the return of stolen land, reparations, self-determination. Tinsel, glitter and warm wishes are not enough.

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