

Racist Policing in Redfern and Beyond

Uncle Ken Canning (Burruga Gutya)

A proud Murri (Aboriginal Person) from the Kunja Clan of the Bidjira People.

The history of Redfern is a chilling reminder of how we got to where we are today. The over-policing at the Empress Hotel in Redfern resonates with the experiences in Brisbane at the Waterloo Hotel, Fortitude Valley and another hotel in Mary Street. Police used to run in, round us up and flog us. I was a kid at the time and didn't drink at all. I used to go to talk to older people about rallies etc, but we got targeted severely.

Redfern is a classic example of how police will target an area with intensity. I remember in the late 1980s when I started working at the University of Technology Sydney, I stated then that the police would do their utmost to clear the area on behalf of governmental and business concerns. They have blitzed this wonderful community from 35 000 Aboriginal residences in the 1960s down to 284 today.¹

Redfern was great in its day. The media played a big part in its demonisation. After the so-called Redfern Riots, the media declared Redfern a no-go area. This was also the case prior to the riots. At different times, the media would splash stories of how police were afraid to go into The Block. I remember in the early 1990s, the media doing a blitz on Our Peoples' violence in Redfern. They kept showing on the 6 o'clock news images of police cars being smashed up. I had every news item taped, it turned out to be the same car shot from different angles and no evidence the shot was even in Redfern. In one scene, footage showed a young boy throwing a large rock, then the shot panned to a smashed up police car. I had seen this boy before. I was living at Campbelltown at the time and it dawned on me that this boy was now grown up and lived up the road from me, married with a few kids.

The late Lester and Gerry Bostock and myself, set up a media watch campaign and we recorded all these types of illegal media campaigns. The tapes I had were confiscated in a raid on my place in Airs, Campbelltown. There was never any excuse given to me for the raid. After this a police car was stationed outside my house every night with its lights going all night and the radio turned up full blast. My young kids could not sleep at all. I complained and the police stated they had no knowledge of such actions or even the raid when my tapes were stolen. Around the same time, my younger brother Robbie had been filming

police interaction with young Murries, and the same treatment was afforded to him: an unauthorised raid and all of his tapes confiscated.

There are some who may believe policing has improved but it is all window dressing. One way to show how policing is still as racist as it was, is the following very compelling statistic. Since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the killings in custody and the incarceration rates have increased, thus proving that any attempt by police to show a more compassionate view is merely a front.² This includes at the hands of Redfern Police with TJ Hickey and Patrick Fisher. It's like a red carpet and my favourite quote is by an unnamed Nigerian political activist: 'history is like a pretty red carpet, rolled out on ceremonial occasions to cover all the bloodstains on the steps.' This sums up what is happening in Redfern and other places in the country today that will become the history of tomorrow.

¹ Danny Teece-Johnson and Robert Burton-Bradley, 'Inner Sydney's Aboriginal Community Fear They are Being Pushed Out for "White Hipsters"', *Special Broadcasting Service* (online), 10 March 2016 <<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/the-point-with-stan-grant/article/2016/03/09/inner-sydneys-aboriginal-community-fear-they-are-being-pushed-out-white-hipsters>>; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2016 Census QuickStats: Redfern*, (23 October 2016) <http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC13339?opendocument>.

² See Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Prisoner Characteristics*, (30 June 2017) <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4517.0~2017~Main%20Features~Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20prisoner%20characteristics~5>>; Lorena Allam, Calla Wahlquist and Nick Evershed, "'National Shame': 147 Indigenous People Die in Custody in Australia in a Decade", *The Guardian* (online), 28 August 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/aug/28/national-shame-147-indigenous-people-die-in-custody-in-australia-in-a-decade>>.