

Listen

(This was an entry in the “What Matters to Me’ competition)

“For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.”¹

It wasn't until I was sixteen that I was taught about the butchering of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in Tasmania, despite being a Tasmanian Aboriginal myself. My year ten English teacher casually taught us that James Cook declared Australia uninhabitable, because the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders way of living was not recognised by the British Colony.

The native inhabitants were forced from their communities and expected to conform and adapt to the culture of the invading forces. These unsuspecting people were terror-stricken. They were hunted, tormented, murdered and exploited because of their culture.

“We apologise, especially for the removal of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.”²

The apology to the Stolen Generations, made by Rudd, was necessary for Australia to take responsibility. The murders that occurred centuries ago remain heavy in the hearts of the native people, who continue to struggle to gain equal rights in their own country. The apology was a stepping stone to end discrimination towards the Indigenous population of Australia.

¹ K. Rudd, speech to House of Representatives. 13 February, 2008
WWW.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/sorry-apology-to-stolen-generation, accessed 11 April 2015

² K. Rudd, speech to House of Representatives. 13 February, 2008
WWW.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/sorry-apology-to-stolen-generation, accessed 11 April 2015

“We today take this first step by acknowledging the past, and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians. A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.”³

Now, eight years later, after the “sorry” headlines on the newspapers have been used as kitty litter, the government is threatening the removal of Aboriginal communities from ‘remote’ locations. Yet they assure us, through spending millions on massive media campaigns, that this is not occurring. Aboriginal culture is only recognised in a minimal way by the government. Voices are becoming silenced as Aboriginal communities across Australia are pleading to keep their traditions and values.

These voices are the ones that matter. These voices are the ones that need to be heard.

It is the people who are receiving unjust treatment, and being forced out of their community that should be heard. They should not be silenced for being a minority. Yet why should the government care about this while worrying about finding ways to sway the majority to their party in the next re-election?

In fact, why should I care?

I am not an active Aboriginal rights activist. I do not go out of my way to educate myself on the issues facing Aboriginal communities. Yet somehow, I seem to know more about Indigenous rights, or rather the lack of them, than those surrounding me. Who remembers the name of John Pat, Eddie Murray, or Mr. Ward?

I do.

³ K. Rudd, speech to House of Representatives. 13 February, 2008
WWW.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/sorry-apology-to-stolen-generation, accessed 11 April 2015

I listened and I care. I listened to the voices pleading for discrimination to stop. I was disgusted by the brutal treatment of Aboriginal people whilst those committing the acts of violence were criticising America for their racism. I recognise the first Australians and I know, despite the passing of time, distance and the language barriers, I decry the unjust treatment towards Aboriginals and Torres Straight Islanders.

I listened. I heard.

The Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders make up a minuscule percentage of the unheard voices pleading to be heard. Pleading for understanding because they look different, they speak differently, they act differently, they try to find some way to fit into this ever changing world that moves forward at a snail's pace. Their voices swarm above our heads in a cloud, lost and unheard because there are 'more important' things to do. There is no time to care.

The silent voices are begging to be heard. There is time. Listen.

Belinda Parry



