
Matt Cunningham: Commission told this city is a racist place, hellbent on oppressing black people.

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Jingili, Moil, Anula, Wagaman, Wanguri, Brinkin, Tiwi, Larrakeyah, Alawa, Nakara, Berrimah, Wulagi. What do these places have in common?

They are all named after Aboriginal people. The list is not exhaustive. It's just the suburbs I was able to come up with off the top of my head while listening to some alarming information being given to co-commissioners Mick Gooda and Margaret White during a Royal Commission community consultation in Darwin in October.

The gentleman standing before the 100 or more people gathered at the Michael Long centre was telling the audience, including the co-commissioners and their counsel assisting, that all the suburbs in Darwin were named after white people. Proof, he said, that this city was a racist place, hellbent on oppressing black people.

Of course, anyone present who has been here for more than a few days knew this statement was untrue. But that's not the problem.

The walls around the room that day were lined with people working for the Royal Commission. People brought in from Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra to listen and take information that might be relevant to the commission's work. Their gasps were almost audible.

My attempts to explain to one of these people that what we'd just been told was nonsense fell on deaf ears, met simply with a response that they couldn't believe the South Alligator River was still referred to by its Anglo name. There's little doubt that by the time this tale made it back to the cafes of Fitzroy and Double Bay, it was being recited as undeniable fact.

Given this grandstanding, it's little wonder many indigenous leaders have said the Royal Commission risks becoming another gabfest that will deliver few real outcomes.

It's also playing up to a tired old stereotype that the Northern Territory is inhabited by tribes of wannabe Ku Klux Klansmen, a myth much of the southern media is only too happy to help propagate. Just last week a Sydney-based news website all but accused NT corrections officers of starving Don Dale teen Dylan Voller as punishment for testifying at the Royal Commission.

The NT Corrections department wasn't even given a chance to respond, but you won't see this story on Media Watch. When the battle lines between good and evil have already been drawn, the truth no longer seems to matter.

As the Royal Commission prepares to resume sittings in Darwin tomorrow, youth justice systems across the country are in crisis. Since the Don Dale report, major issues have emerged in Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania. Last month in

Victoria, juvenile detainees were moved from the Parkville youth justice centre to the maximum-security Barwon adult prison.

Then the Victorian Government decided to move the indigenous children back while keeping the non-indigenous kids locked down in the adult jail. None of this will be examined by the Royal Commission. Its hastily-compiled terms of reference mean the Northern Territory's corrections system is the only one on trial. Yet surely the Royal Commission's time would be better spent examining the treatment of children in detention across the country, than hearing tall tales about how Darwin suburbs got their names.