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What's the Goodes in preaching division?

BLINDED BY THE GREEN LIGHT

Our history is not as simple as Goodes claims. Nor is our guilt.

Footballer Adam Goodes has let us down as Australian of the Year, using his soapbox to vilify our past and preach division.

The Swans captain this week denounced "our very dark past, a brutal history of dispossession, theft and slaughter".

"Europeans, and the governments that have run our country, have raped, killed and stolen," he wrote in Fairfax newspapers.

Goodes attacked Australians who resisted this lurid characterisation of our past. "The people who benefited most from those rapes, those killings and that theft ... turn away in disgust when someone seeks to expose it."

A word to Goodes, who identifies as a "proud Aboriginal man" - an Aboriginal from a Flinders Ranges tribe.

Adam, my grandparents committed no thefts, rapes or murders.

My ancestors were all in Europe when, you claim, our governments were raping and slaughtering Aboriginals.

Adam, you yourself have European ancestors. I trust you can vouch they, too committed no rapes and slaughters.

So why are you on one side of your racial division and I on the guilty other?

And when you attack "the people who benefited most from those rapes, those killings and that theft", do you include yourself?

After all, you've benefited more than most from the society built, you claim, by "the people in whose name the oppression was done".

Before British settlement, Aboriginal deaths in tribal warfare rivalled European losses, per capita, in World War One, says historian Geoffrey Blainey in *Triumph of the Nomad*.

Life for many Aboriginals then was brutally harsh, and often included appalling rates of violence against women, as established by paleopathology expert Stephen Webb from the evidence of fractured skulls.

But Goodes now is rich

and famous despite the racism he suffered when young. He has freedom, the best health care and a life of luxury unimaginable to his distant ancestors.

So why didn't he praise the good as well as acknowledge the bad of our past - a bad which he seems to have grossly exaggerated?

Why didn't Goodes say that to divide us by "race" is a nonsense now, with our tangled genealogies?

But I am not surprised by the divisive rhetoric.

After all, a 13-year-old girl was subjected to national humiliation after she shouted "ape" at the bearded footballer from the sidelines of a tense game.

She was removed from the stands and made to wait two hours after she'd been interviewed by police while IT was decided what to do with her.

She was then called the "face" of racism. The girl was named and film of her shown around the country, although she insisted she had not meant "ape" as a racial slur and was sorry.

There was only one way Goodes, a powerful adult, could be seen as the victim in this contest with a schoolgirl.

It reduced these two individuals to the crudest of racial stereotypes - black victim and white oppressor.

It was to twist the facts to suit the fiction of a country riven by racism.

For instance, he said his mother, raised by an English family, was "a member of the stolen generations". But whether the Stolen generations exist is a highly contested issue. She came from South Australia, which the state's Supreme Court found in 2007 never had a policy of removing children just because they were Aboriginal.

Brian Bennett worked for Aboriginals Department when Goodes' mother was a girl and told the court: "I don't believe that I, at any time during my career as a welfare officer, had the power to remove an Aboriginal child from its parents."

The judge also cited a letter written in 1958 by the Secretary of the Aboriginals Protection Board: "Our legis-

lation does not provide that neglected children can be removed from their parents, except by transfer to the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Board who in any case will not accept them."

In South Australia, Aboriginal children could only be adopted "with the authority of the parents" but too few got that chance - as Goodes' mother apparently did.

"Unfortunately, there is a considerable amount of undernourishment, malnutrition and neglect," the secretary mourned.

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Picture: Phil Hilliard.

TONY Abbott on Tuesday said something shocking - that a great thing about trees was that you can make stuff from them. You know, like "a workbench for the new family home" or the "timber canoe which I paddled around the Lane Cove River National Park in Year 8".

Bits of a Tasmanian forest could even be used in a "magnificent example of an Australian-made chair" - like the one the Prime Minister told a forestry industry dinner he was going to stick in his office. So what, you might ask. What's the big deal about seeing a tree and dreaming of furniture? Well, it's a blasphemy against the green religion that has Greens leader Christine Milne smelling sulphur. "It's clear we have a government with an Old Testament view of the environment - that man alone can dominate the environment."

True, Abbott in declaring "we have too much locked-up forest" in Tasmania did mention God, telling the foresters: "You intelligently make the most of the good things that God has given us."

It is also true his message - "the environment is meant for man" - draws from the Bible: "Replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion ... over every living thing". But his is also a human-centric vision that appeals to agnostics like me. Why shouldn't humans use nature? Which god says no? Well, the green one.

For years greens politicians preached we have no right to rule nature, which has its own rights. Just two years ago Prime Minister Julia Gillard flew to the Rio Conference for the High Mass of this green faith, to ink the final draft of a global green gospel.

"The planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home," the document ommed, "and some countries recognize the rights of nature ... It is necessary to promote harmony with nature."

Pardon: Is there likely to be harmony if I chainsaw down a Tasmanian tree to make a table? "No," scream the Greens. But Abbott now says "Yes". Humans do rule, and it's CHRISTINE MILNE