

WHY CONSTITUTIONAL ENSHRINEMENT OF AN INDIGENOUS VOICE TO PARLIAMENT IS SO CRUCIAL FOR AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE

In her essay [The Heart of Seeding First Nations Sovereignty: Our giilangs, our stories](#) published in the Griffith Review (October 2020) in time for the third anniversary of the Federal Government's rejection of the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart', Teela Reid outlines why the specified sequence of: Voice, Treaty and Truth-telling must be honoured. Like the Uluru Statement her essay is written to the Australian people. Here is an extract.

Enshrinement of a First Nations Voice to Parliament in the Constitution would allow for the subsequent establishment of a Makarrata Commission to enable a process of treaty and truth-telling. The order of these reforms is crucial to the exercise of self-determination that will ensure all First Nations have a seat at the treaty table, not just the loudest or the most influential.

Make no mistake: enshrining a First Nations Voice to Parliament is a radical attempt to decolonise power structures and disrupt systems that have historically oppressed us. That is the very reason why the political elite continue to dismiss the idea. The obligation of Federal Parliament (not just the government) to be accountable to our grassroots mob has the potential to become a powerful mechanism to dismantle the colony as we know it, speaking truth to power.

No politician or Royal Commission is going to save us, to right the wrongs. Without systemic change, structural powerlessness will continue to cripple our communities' rights to exercise sovereignty and self-determination. We must remain vigilant and clear-sighted about Australia's failure to hear the First Nations.

The call for a First Nations Voice to the Australian Parliament, simple yet profound, ought to recognise that we are allowed to disagree and debate issues – even if that means demonstrating a walk-out from the negotiating table. We are not a homogenous group: this is blak politik, not playschool. No one expects white Australia to agree on every issue, and this expectation – often placed on First Nations – is an excuse to halt critical and substantive change.

When it comes to blak activism, whatever the call to action demands – accountability for Aboriginal deaths in custody; defunding police; abolishing prisons; paying the rent; dismantling racism; decolonising institutions; or promoting healing for intergenerational trauma – we as First Nations are eternally bound by our relationships with our countries. And these stories connect us to one another as sovereign First Nations.

Imagining a country that respects the authority of First Nations sovereignty requires an honest narrative about Australia's story. Our search for truth requires us to reimagine the architecture of how power functions – and visualising that this can change.

Too often, the politics of fear has hindered our capacity to grapple with the truth of our past, because the status quo has delivered a life of comfort for many Australians who assume this country originated from a peaceful settlement. The real challenge now is whether we can harness our collective energy to create sustainable change that delivers truth, justice and accountability.

This means continuing to hold space for difficult conversations when #BLM is not trending, to discuss the reality of racism in our society. It means recognising that Aboriginal land in Aboriginal hands is climate justice in action. That the moral force of lore is beyond the measure of Western law. That the way to a powerful treaty is to enshrine a First Nations Voice – and that this is only the beginning of revolutionising and redistributing power, not the end.

There are many chapters to our nation's story: which one will we write?

Always was, always will be sovereign First Nations land, sky and sea – so let's seed sovereignty. Our giilang; our story.

See also: [Voice will End Cycle of Instability](https://www.smh.com.au/national/voice-will-end-cycle-of-instability-20190526-p51rar.htm) by Megan Davis, Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous UNSW and Professor of Law. Published in The Sydney Morning Herald, 27 May, 2019. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/voice-will-end-cycle-of-instability-20190526-p51rar.htm>