

Paul Keating: The Redfern Address, 1992

Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating gave [this speech](#) in Redfern, Sydney in 1992. The speech was voted one of the most important Australian speeches in a [survey by the Australian ABC](#) network.

Keating talks about the problems of Australian Aboriginal people and lays the blame firmly on the non-Aboriginal settlers.

The [speech](#) and complete [transcript](#) can be heard and read on the Australian Screen Online website. It's a fascinating site.

Paul Keating: We non-Aboriginal Australians should perhaps remind ourselves that Australia once reached out for us. Didn't Australia provide opportunity and care for the dispossessed Irish? The poor of Britain? The refugees from war and famine and persecution in the countries of Europe and Asia?

Isn't it reasonable to say that if we can build a prosperous and remarkably harmonious multicultural society in Australia, surely we can find just solutions to the problems which beset the first Australians – the people to whom the most injustice has been done.

And as I say, the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us, the non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with an act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases and the alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination

and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine that these things could be done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask, 'How would I feel if this was done to me?' As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded us all.

If we need a reminder of this, we received it in this year with the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody which showed, with devastating clarity, that the past lives on in inequality, racism and injustice, in the prejudice and ignorance of non-Aboriginal Australians, and in the demoralisation and desperation, the fractured identity, of so many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

For all this, I do not believe that the Report should fill us with guilt. Down the years, there's been no shortage of guilt, but it has not produced the response we need. Guilt, I think we've all learned, is not a very constructive emotion. I think what we need to do is open our hearts a bit. All of us.